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«НЕИЗВЕСТНАЯ ВОЙНА»

ВСЕ
МИФЫ
О ВТОРОЙ
МИРОВОЙ

Abstract

"UNKNOWN WAR" - this is how the famous documentary television series by Roman Karmen about the Second World War, filmed at the end of the Soviet era, was called in the American box office. But even today, 67 years after the Victory, the Great Patriotic War remains largely an unknown war, the history of which is mythologized through and through - we judge it not so much by documents and facts as by propaganda legends and ideological clichés inherited from the USSR. Every nation has patriotic myths, during the war they are absolutely necessary, belief in them strengthens the morale of the army. But two-thirds of a century after the catastrophe, the time has come not to believe, but to know - if only in order to prevent its repetition.

This book is a real "assault on mirages." This sensational investigation refutes the most common and long-held myths about the Second World War, restoring the true story of the greatest tragedy of the 20th century in all its horror and

greatness.

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Boris Sokolov

**All the myths about the Second
World War: "Unknown War"**

The myth of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact



The main myth associated with the Soviet-German non-aggression pact is that it was caused by the failure of the negotiations for an alliance with Britain and France, dictated by concern for the security of the USSR, as well as Stalin's fear of Hitler and the desire to prevent or at least put off a clash with Germany. The pact with Germany is also often regarded as Stalin's mistake. In March 1939, Hitler occupied Czechoslovakia, nullifying the Munich

Agreements. After that, England and France gave guarantees of the security and territorial integrity of Poland, which could become the next victim of German aggression. Thus, the collapse of the policy of "appeasement" was recognized. On May 3, 1939, the chairman of the Council of People's Commissars, Vyacheslav Molotov, replaced Maxim Litvinov as People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs. This removed an important obstacle to the start of negotiations with Germany at the highest level. Litvinov was not suitable for such negotiations, both because of his Jewish origin, and because his name was associated with the policy of collective security directed against Germany. German next day

Chargé d'Affaires in Moscow reported: "It is believed that Molotov (not a Jew) is 'Stalin's closest friend and colleague.' His appointment apparently guarantees that foreign policy will continue to be carried out in strict accordance with Stalin's ideas. In

the summer of 1939, Hitler was preparing to attack Poland, from which he demanded the concession of the "Danzig Corridor", which separated East Prussia from the rest of Germany. On August 11, negotiations began in Moscow on concluding a military alliance between the USSR, England and France. Paris and London saw in this alliance the only way to prevent the occupation of Poland by the Reich, since they themselves could not quickly deploy their armies against Hitler. In addition, in France, the public was not eager to "die for Danzig." Stalin, on the other hand, needed negotiations with Paris and London to put pressure on Hitler. As early as August 7, the Politburo decided at the right time to present to the partners a deliberately unacceptable demand for the preliminary admission of the Red Army to the territory of Poland and Romania. England and France could not agree to this demand without the consent of Poland and Rumania. And there was no chance to get the consent of Warsaw and Bucharest. According to Winston Churchill, "an obstacle to the conclusion of such an agreement (with the USSR) was the horror that these same border states experienced before Soviet help in the form of Soviet armies that could pass through their territories to protect them from the Germans and, along the way, include them in the Soviet Union. communist system. After all, they were the most violent opponents of this system. Poland, Romania, Finland and the three Baltic states did not know what they were more afraid of - German aggression or Russian salvation. Also, doubts about the combat capability of the Red Army were one of the important reasons why England and France in 1939 were in no hurry to enter into a military alliance with the USSR. Chamberlain admitted in a private letter back in March that he did not believe that Soviet Russia "would be able to conduct effective offensive operations even if it wanted to." The weakness of the Red Army was soon proved by the Soviet-Finnish war. But Chamberlain was seriously mistaken when he told members of his cabinet that he did not believe in "the strength of Russia and doubted her ability to provide assistance in case of war."

Accusing partners of unwillingness to put pressure on Poland and Romania, Moscow broke off negotiations and on August 21 announced its intention to receive Reich Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop. Due to the haste, the Soviet air defense did not have time to warn, and Ribbentrop's plane was fired upon. Berlin turned a blind eye to the incident. The agreement with the USSR was more important.

On August 22, on the eve of the conclusion of the Soviet-German pact, Chamberlain wrote to Hitler: "Whatever the essence of the Soviet-German treaty may be, it cannot change the obligation of Great Britain towards Poland, which His Majesty's Government has repeatedly and clearly stated and which it intends fulfill". By agreeing to the Soviet-German non-aggression pact, the Fuhrer knew that a German attack on Poland would lead to World War II. On August 23, Ribbentrop arrived in Moscow, where, together with

Molotov, he signed the Non-Aggression Treaty and a secret additional protocol to it on the delimitation of "spheres of interest." The Soviet side insisted on the protocol. In Poland, it was carried out along the lines of the Narew, Vistula and San rivers. In addition, Germany received Lithuania, and the USSR - Latvia, Estonia, Finland and Bessarabia. The treaty gave the green light to German aggression against Poland, and thus to the Second World War. Hitler on August 28 told his party comrades: "This is a pact with Satan to exorcise the devil." Stalin thought the same way, hoping that when Hitler got bogged down on the Western Front, it would be possible to stab him in the back and capture at least half of Europe. Subsequently, Stalin, and after him other Soviet politicians and historians, argued that the USSR was forced to

sign a non-aggression pact with Germany, since in August 1939 there was a real threat of the formation of a united anti-Soviet front of Germany, Italy, England and France. In fact, at that moment between Hitler and the Western powers after the occupation and dismemberment of Czechoslovakia, there was not even the minimum mutual trust necessary to create any joint political combinations, not to mention a united anti-Soviet front. Moreover, it was well known that both the political leadership and the public

the opinion of England and especially France did not want to fight with anyone: neither with Germany, nor with Russia. Likewise, the direct German attack on the Soviet Union alone, without the support of the Allies, as well as the Soviet attack on Germany without the support of England and France, in August 1939 could not be considered as real political alternatives either by Stalin, or Hitler, or by British and French leaders. Stalin deliberately pushed Germany against England and France, but he was going to fight only against Germany in order to maximize his zone of influence in Europe during such a war. The only mistake the Soviet leader made was that he did not expect a German attack in 1941 and that he was going to strike first that same year. The treaty did not ensure the security of the USSR and led to huge losses in the war with Germany. However, the non-aggression pact ultimately guaranteed an alliance with Britain and the United States and a Soviet victory in World War II.

The myth of the Battle of the Atlantic

The Battle of the Atlantic refers to the actions of the German fleet, and primarily submarines, during the Second World War, aimed at cutting off the supply of the British Isles, as well as the actions of the British and American fleets aimed at destroying German surface raiders and submarines in the Atlantic and adjacent to the British islands of the seas. The term "Battle of the Atlantic" was first officially used by Winston Churchill in a speech on March 6, 1941 in connection with the sharply increased losses of the British merchant fleet. The main myth of the Battle of the Atlantic is associated with the assertion that with the help of submarines, Germany almost brought England to her knees. Germany also hoped to force England

into peace, both through submarine warfare and through surface raider action against British merchant shipping. Until July 1940, the war at sea was conducted according to the norms of prize law, the main emphasis was on surface ships, and neutral ships were not attacked. However, the tactics of surface raiding had to be abandoned after the British Navy, with great difficulty and with the loss of the battlecruiser Hood, managed to track down and sink the largest German battleship Bismarck on May 27, 1941. His death just coincided with the capture of Crete by German paratroopers. The Turkish Foreign Minister commented on these events in the following way: "The British still have many islands scattered around the world, and the Germans will not have a second Bismarck." For the construction of a large surface fleet, including aircraft carriers absolutely necessary for the successful conduct of a war at sea, Germany had neither the time nor the means, since the main industrial capacities were used for the needs of the ground forces, aviation and the submarine fleet. The only German aircraft carrier Graf Zeppelin remained unfinished.

In general, the raiders did not justify themselves. Their share in the destroyed merchant tonnage was negligible, and the losses were great and irreplaceable. Somewhat more effective were the so-called

"commercial raiders" - merchant ships armed with artillery. However, they could only operate in unprotected waters - in the Indian Ocean and the South Atlantic. The German submarines

were much more successful. At the beginning of the war, Germany had only 57 submarines, adapted to sail only in coastal waters. After the surrender of France, when Hitler tried at all costs to break the resistance of England, using new bases in France and Belgium, Germany gradually switched to unrestricted submarine warfare. During the war years, more than a thousand submarines were built, a significant part of which was intended for operations in the ocean. The commander of the submarine fleet, Grand Admiral Karl Dönitz, developed the tactics of "wolf packs", when, unlike the First World War, groups of submarines attacked convoys of ships. A supply system for submarines in the ocean, far from bases, was also established, which significantly expanded their radius of action.

In submarine warfare, in the early years of Germany, impressive successes were achieved. The number of submarines constantly participating in combat campaigns was increased from 10-15 in the autumn of 1940 to 35-40 in the summer of 1941 and was maintained at this level for almost the entire war. The submarine war reached its climax in March 1943, when German submarines sank enemy ships with a total tonnage of about 0.5 million gross register tons in the Atlantic, and about 200,000 more gross tons in other seas. However, in the future, the widespread use of aircraft and radars capable of detecting underwater targets, as well as the commissioning of a large number of escort ships, including aircraft carriers, helped the Allies cope with the underwater threat. The American shipbuilding industry increased its capacity and was able to compensate for the loss of merchant shipping. The number of destroyed submarines began to increase rapidly. So, in June 1943, the Germans lost 21 submarines, and in July - already 33. The tonnage of sunk ships decreased and in 1944 rarely exceeded 100 thousand gross tons per month. In the second half of 1944, when the Germans lost bases in France and Belgium, the effectiveness of submarine attacks decreased significantly. In total, during the war years, German submarines sank 3,000 allied ships with a displacement of about 14.5 million board, as well as 178 warships and 11 auxiliary cruisers. For the share of the German

U-boats account for 68% of Allied merchant tonnage losses and 37.5% of warship losses. About 70 thousand sailors and about 30 thousand sailors of the Allied merchant fleet were killed. During the same time, new merchant ships were built in England with a total displacement of 4.5 million gross tons, and in the USA - about 35 million gross tons, which in total was almost three times the tonnage sunk. Of the 1,153 submarines that entered service with the German Navy, 659 boats were sunk at sea, 63 were victims of bombing in harbors, and another 58 were lost as a result of accidents. Of the boats that survived by the end of the war, 219 were sunk by their crews after the surrender, and 154 were transferred to the Allies. Of the approximately 40,000 German submariners, about 24,000 died and 5,000 were captured. In the last months of the war, the latest German submarines of the XXI project were put into operation. They had an underwater speed of 17.5 knots - almost twice as much as any other submarine in the world. Using a snorkel - a device for recharging batteries and electric turbines that worked without atmospheric air supply, these boats could swim up to 10 thousand miles without ever surfacing. In addition, by the end of the war, light submarines with electric motors, the so-called "seals" took part in the hostilities.

(XXIV project), which developed underwater speed up to 24 knots. If these boats had been created a year or two earlier, then, according to some naval experts, the outcome of the submarine war could have been different. However, this is hardly true. The new type of boats were effective only in the sense that they were much harder to detect and sink (although they were still detected by radar). Therefore, their losses would undoubtedly be less than the losses of boats of other types. However, the ability to sink enemy ships was determined primarily by their ammunition of torpedoes, mines and artillery shells. And here there was no fundamental difference with other ocean-going submarines. The new types of boats were considerably more expensive to build than the old types, and would be produced in fewer numbers than the old types could have been made to replace them. So a fundamental increase in the sunk tonnage with the advent of boats XXI and XXIV projects could not happen. Also, some experts believe that the German

submarine warfare would have been more effective if submarine operations had focused on attacks against warships and military transports with troops and military equipment, and not on sinking merchant ships, often empty, as Dönitz did. However, it is unlikely that such tactics would bring victory. After all, attacks by warships and specially guarded convoys with troops were associated with a much greater risk for submarines, and their losses would invariably increase. At the same time, the forces of submarines would still not be enough to make the British fleet incapacitated or disrupt the transportation of American troops to England. England and the

USA, taking into account the power of American shipbuilding and escort forces, never faced the threat of defeat in the Battle of the Atlantic with German submarines. A real decrease in merchant tonnage due to losses occurred only when the American industry was just increasing the production of cheap Liberty ships, and starting from the second half of 1943, German submariners could no longer jeopardize the supply of the British Isles. In addition, already in the autumn of 1943, after the surrender of Italy, the Germans lost their main bases in the Mediterranean, which sharply limited the activities of submarines in this region.

The myth of voluntary accession to the USSR of Western Ukraine and Western Belarus

The main myth associated with the so-called "liberation campaign" of the Red Army in Western Ukraine and Western Belarus in September 1939 was undertaken to save the Ukrainians and Belarusians of Poland from German occupation after the defeat of the Polish army. At the same time, it was denied that Soviet troops entered Poland in pursuance of a secret additional protocol to the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, according to which the eastern provinces of Poland were falling into the Soviet sphere of interests. It was also alleged that the Soviet troops crossed the Soviet-Polish border precisely on September 17 because on that day the Polish government and the high command of the army left the territory of the country. In fact, on that day, the Polish government and Commander-in-Chief Marshal Edward Rydz-Smigly were still on Polish territory, although they had left Warsaw.

According to the Soviet propaganda myth, the population of Western Ukraine and Western Belarus overwhelmingly welcomed the arrival of the Red Army and unanimously spoke in favor of joining the USSR. In fact, the ethnic composition of

the population of the annexed territories was such that it ruled out the possibility that the majority of the inhabitants would be in favor of joining the USSR. In 1938, in Poland, according to official statistics, out of 35 million inhabitants, there were 24 million Poles, 5 Ukrainians, and 1.4 million Belarusians. However, at the direction of Stalin, Pravda wrote about 8 million Ukrainians and 3 million Belarusians in the occupied Red Army of Ukrainian and Belarusian provinces. Elections to the People's Assemblies of Western Ukraine and Western Belarus were held there. Elections were held according to the principle: one person per seat. Only communists and their allies were nominated as deputies, and any agitation against them was prohibited. In October 1939, People's Assemblies

proclaimed Soviet power and appealed to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR with a request for reunification with Ukraine and Belarus, which was granted in November.

Stalin did not hold a plebiscite on joining the USSR in Western Ukraine and Western Belarus. There was no certainty that the majority of the population of the liberated territories would vote for joining the USSR, and hardly anyone in the world would recognize its obviously falsified results. According to the 1931 census, 5.6 million Poles, 4.3 million Ukrainians, 1.7 million Belarusians, 1.1 million Jews, 126 thousand Russians, 87 thousand Germans and 136 thousand Jews lived in Western Ukraine and Western Belarus. representatives of other nationalities. In Western Belarus, Poles predominated in Bialystok (66.9%), Vilna (59.7%) and Novogrudok (52.4%) voivodships, Belarusians - only in Polessky (69.2%). 2.3 million Poles, 1.7 million Belarusians and 452 thousand Jews lived in Western Belarus. In the Western Ukrainian voivodships, Poles prevailed in Lviv (57.7%) and Tarnopol (49.7%) voivodeships (in Tarnopol voivodeship, Ukrainians accounted for 45.5%), Ukrainians - in Volyn (68.4%) and Stanislavovsk (68.9%). 3.3 million Poles, 4.3 million Ukrainians and 628,000 Jews lived in Western Ukraine. In Western Ukraine, the illegal Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists

(OUN), which advocated the independence of Ukraine, was popular. OUN members fought against the Polish authorities, including using terrorist methods. They also attacked the Soviet representatives. No less hostile than the Poles, Ukrainian nationalists treated the Soviet government. There was no noticeable Belarusian national movement in Western Belarus. But a significant part of the Belarusian population of Western Belarus was made up of Catholic Belarusians, who were culturally and politically oriented towards the Poles. And the Poles made up about half of the population of Western Belarus. The Ukrainian and Belarusian population in Poland (mostly peasants) fought for their national rights, but they were not going to join the USSR, having heard about terror

and famine. Yes, and Ukrainians and Belarusians lived in Poland more prosperously than poor Soviet

collective farmers. Nevertheless, the Red Army's invasion was received calmly, and even enthusiastically by the Jews, who were threatened with Hitler's genocide. However, the measures of the Soviet government quickly led to the fact that in 1941 Ukrainians and Belarusians greeted the Germans with bread and salt, as liberators from the Bolsheviks. The Polish General

Vladislav Anders cited in his memoirs the stories of the inhabitants of Lvov about how the Bolsheviks "robbed not only private, but also state property", how the NKVD penetrated all spheres of life, about crowds of refugees who, having learned what it was like to live under the Bolsheviks, despite what, they want to go to the lands occupied by the Germans.

There were many facts of looting and unauthorized executions from side of the fighters and commanders of the Red Army.

The commanders guilty of unauthorized executions did not suffer any serious punishment. People's Commissar of Defense Kliment Voroshilov only reprimanded them, pointing out that there was no deliberate evil will in the actions of those guilty of illegal actions, that all this happened "in an atmosphere of hostilities and an acute class and national struggle of the local Ukrainian and Jewish population with former Polish gendarmes and officers."

Often the murders of Poles were committed by the local Ukrainian and Belarusian Secretary of the Brest Regional Committee of the CP(b)B. Kiselev said in April 1940: "There were many such murders of sworn enemies of the people, committed in the anger of the people in the first days of the arrival of the Red Army. We justify them, we are on the side of those who, having come out of captivity, dealt with their enemy.

Even before June 22, 1941, massive forced collectivization began in Western Ukrainian and Western Belarusian lands. The intelligentsia was accused of "bourgeois nationalism" and repressed. Before the start of World War II, 108 thousand people, mostly Poles, were arrested in Western Ukraine and Western Belarus. A significant part of them were shot on the eve and in the first weeks of the Great Patriotic War. According to the verdicts of the tribunals and the Special Conference alone, 930 people were shot. About 6 thousand more prisoners were shot at the beginning of the war during the evacuation of prisons in Western Ukraine and more than 600 people in Western Belarus.

In December 1939, a predatory monetary reform was carried out. Zlotys on accounts and deposits of the population were exchanged for rubles at the rate of 1:1, but in the amount of not more than 300 zlotys.

The behavior of many representatives of the new government did not arouse sympathy among the population. So, as noted in party documents, in the Drogobych region, "the head of the NKVD RO of the Novostreletsky district, Kochetov, on November 7, 1940, drunk drunk, in the village club, in the presence of the head of the police RO Psekh, severely beat the farm laborer Tsaritsa with a revolver, who was taken to the hospital in a difficult situation". In the Bogorodchansky district of the Stanislav region, the communist Syrovatsky "summoned the peasants on the issue of tax at night, threatened them, forced the girls to cohabit." In the Obertynsky district of the same region, "there were massive violations of revolutionary legality." In a letter addressed to Stalin, the

assistant to the Rivne Regional Prosecutor Sergeev noted: "It would seem that with the liberation of Western Ukraine, the best forces of the country, crystal-clearly honest and unshakable Bolsheviks, should have been sent here to work, but it turned out the other way around. In the majority, big and small rogues got here, from whom they tried to get rid of in their homeland. The Soviet cadres, who replaced the Polish administration, were often

unable to organize the economy. One of the delegates of the Volyn regional party conference in April 1940 was indignant: "Why were the streets watered every day under the Poles, swept with brooms, but now there is nothing?" In 1939-1940, about 280 thousand Poles were deported from the western regions of

Ukraine and Belarus to the eastern regions of the USSR, including 78 thousand refugees from the regions of Poland occupied by the Germans. About 6 thousand people died on the way. In June 1941, just before the start of the Great Patriotic War, 11,000 "Ukrainian nationalists and counter-revolutionaries" were also deported from Western Ukraine. With the outbreak of the Great Patriotic War, many natives of the western regions of Ukraine and Belarus deserted from the Red Army or evaded mobilization.

The issue of international legal recognition of the Soviet annexation of Western Ukraine and Western Belarus was finally resolved

The agreement on the Soviet-Polish state border, which on August 16, 1945 the USSR concluded with the pro-communist government of Poland. The Soviet-Polish border passed mainly along the Curzon line, but with the return of the cities of Bialystok and Przemyśl (Przemysl) to Poland.

Myth of the Mannerheim line

The main myths of the Mannerheim Line and the Soviet-Finnish war, which lasted from November 30, 1939 to March 13, 1940, consisted in the assertion that the fighting was provoked by the provocative shelling of the Red Army from the Finnish side near the village of Mainila on the Karelian Isthmus, and that Finnish fortifications were here, Unofficially called the Mannerheim Line, they were almost impregnable, but the Red Army successfully broke through them, albeit with losses. In reality, the Soviet attack on Finland

was an unprovoked aggression within the framework of the implementation of the secret additional protocol to the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, according to which Finland retreated into the sphere of Soviet interests. On November 21, 1939, the troops of the Leningrad District and the Baltic Fleet subordinate to it received a directive from the Military Council of the Leningrad Military District, which noted: "The Finnish army has completed its concentration and deployment near the border of the USSR." The Soviet troops were ordered to launch an offensive, the plan of which was required to be submitted on November 22 (at the same time the order was given to begin advancing to the border). The duration of the operation was planned to be three weeks. At the same time, it was specially stipulated: "A special directive will be given about the time of going over to the offensive." On November 23, the political department of the LVO sent the following instructions to the troops: "We are not marching as conquerors, but as friends of the Finnish people ... The Red Army supports the Finnish people, who stand for friendship with the Soviet Union ... Victory over the enemy must be achieved with little bloodshed."

The order to start the invasion was given verbally by Stalin. On November 26, 1939, the NKVD carried out a provocative shelling of Soviet positions near the border village of Mainila. According to the official Soviet version, four Red Army soldiers were killed and eight wounded. In fact, the reports of the 68th Infantry Regiment of the 70th Division located in this area indicate that the regiment did not have any losses that day.

and did not record shots. Finnish observers recorded that Mainila was fired from Soviet territory.

After the Mainil incident, the USSR denounced the non-aggression pact with Finland and severed diplomatic relations with it. On November 30, Soviet troops invaded Finnish territory.

On the Karelian Isthmus, the Red Army was opposed by the Mannerheim Line, named after the commander-in-chief of the Finnish army, Marshal Carl Gustav Mannerheim. It consisted of a support strip (width 15-60 km), a main strip (depth 7-10 km), a second strip 2-15 km away from the main one, and a rear (Vyborg) defense strip. The main line of defense consisted of 25 nodes of resistance, numbering 280 pillboxes and 800 pillboxes. However, only 130 pillboxes were combat-ready and only 8 had artillery weapons. On the intermediate and rear lanes, only 10 pillboxes and 98 pillboxes were usable. The density of fortifications was about 10 times lower than on the Maginot Line in France. With a well-organized offensive by a well-trained army, which has an overwhelming superiority in tanks, artillery and aircraft, the Mannerheim Line did not pose a serious obstacle. However, the Red Army did not know how to deal properly with military equipment, headquarters did not know how to plan operations, commanders did not know how to organize the interaction of military branches on the battlefield, and ordinary Red Army soldiers for the most part did not know how, unlike the Finns, not only to ski, but even to shoot. Attempts to break through the Mannerheim Line on

the move did not bring success and led to heavy losses. We had to concentrate additional forces and means at the front. On February 1, 1940, the North-Western Front was

formed as part of the 7th and 13th armies. It was headed by Army Commander 1st Rank Semyon Timoshenko. The 8th, 9th and 14th armies operated in the area of Lake Ladoga and to the north. Several partial

offensive operations were undertaken to disorient the enemy as to the direction of the main attack. Every day for several days, 12,000 shells were fired at the fortifications of the Mannerheim Line. The Finns answered rarely, but aptly. Therefore, Soviet artillerymen had to

abandon the most effective direct fire and conduct from closed positions and mainly in areas, since reconnaissance of targets and adjustment were poorly established. On the morning of February 11, a general offensive began. The artillery preparation lasted 2.5-3 hours. On the first day, the divisions of the 7th Army were able to penetrate the defense system of the Sumy fortified center, the fall of which the front command hastened to notify Moscow on the same day. In fact, the Amount was taken only on 14 February. The 13th Army also pressed the Finns and reached the Muolaa-Ilves-Salmenkaita-Ritasari line. On February 21, the Red Army was forced to suspend the offensive due to heavy losses and depletion of ammunition. The attacks resumed two days later. At the same time, the Finns managed to inflict a partial defeat on several battalions of the 23rd Rifle Corps of the 13th Army and even take prisoners. But the Finnish command, realizing that the breakthrough in the Summa area could not be liquidated, on the evening of February 23, began a retreat to the rear defensive zone in order to maintain the integrity of the front. By the end of February, Soviet troops reached the Finnish rear defensive positions in the Vyborg region. The battle for this city continued until the conclusion of a truce. On March 2, troops of the 7th Army reached the approaches to Vyborg from the south, and

units of the 13th Army pushed the Finns to the Vuoksi River, threatening Kexholm. At dawn on March 4, a bridgehead was captured on the western shore of the Vyborg Bay. Finnish troops in Vyborg were threatened with encirclement. On March 7, the 50th Corps cut the Vyborg-Antrea railway. With counterattacks, the Finns were able to somewhat slow down the advance of the Soviet units, but they did not reach a radical change. Formations of the 13th Army crossed Vuoksi. The battle for this city

continued until the conclusion of a truce. The final chord of the war was the senseless assault on Vyborg, undertaken a few hours before the entry into force of the Moscow Peace Treaty concluded on March 12, 1940, according to which Vyborg already retreated to the Soviet Union along with the entire Karelian Isthmus. This assault cost hundreds of lives, but did not lead to success. The Finns calmly held out until the hour of the cessation

fire at noon on March 13, and then left the city, wondering why the Russians were killing their soldiers in vain.

By the end of the war, the Red Army had a group of more than 1 million people on the Finnish front. 58 Soviet divisions managed to visit the battle. Another 4 divisions remained in reserve, and 10 were preparing to be transferred to the front. The Soviet grouping on the Karelian Isthmus consisted of almost 760 thousand soldiers and commanders, more than 7100 guns and mortars, almost 3 thousand tanks, more than 600 armored vehicles and 2 thousand aircraft. By the end of the war, they were opposed by about 340 thousand Finnish soldiers, who had 944 field and 341 anti-tank and anti-aircraft guns. By the beginning of the war, Finland had 30 tanks and 130 aircraft.

In the "winter war" Finnish losses are known for sure. They amounted to 22,830 killed and died from wounds and captured military personnel. 876 people were taken prisoner, of which 13 died, and 20 remained in the USSR. In addition, 1,029 civilians were killed.

The USSR lost at least 131.5 thousand dead, included in the nominal lists. If we add here the losses of the Navy and the NKVD troops, as well as the dead who were not included in the lists, then the irretrievable losses of the Red Army may increase to 170 thousand. The ratio of irretrievable losses, obviously, was close to 7.5: 1, i.e. . was about the same as the ratio of Soviet and German losses in the Great Patriotic War. About 6 thousand Red Army soldiers were taken prisoner. 5486 of them were repatriated in May 1940, and another 200-300 later that year, 113 died in captivity and 200-300 in Finland. it is possible that the Armored Forces of the Red Army irretrievably lost 650 tanks in more than battles with the enemy, about 1800 were knocked out, and 1500 were out of action for technical reasons. The Finns captured 131 tanks as trophies. The irretrievable losses of Soviet aviation amounted to at least 522 aircraft (of which 182 crashed in accidents). The Finns irretrievably lost 67 aircraft and 27 tanks.

The myth of Dunkirk

The main myth associated with the evacuation of the British Expeditionary Force from Dunkirk in late May - early June 1940 is the assertion that Hitler deliberately allowed the British to leave by stopping the panzer divisions pursuing them. Thus, he hoped that England, not having experienced the humiliation of capturing its expeditionary force, would be more willing to conclude peace with Germany, which would make it possible to throw all German forces against the Soviet Union. At the same time, for some reason, the circumstance is overlooked that, having lost the expeditionary corps, England would become much more accommodating in accepting the German peace proposals. In fact, Hitler's famous "stop order" was caused by purely military considerations. Moreover, he did not affect the course of the evacuation of British troops from Dunkirk.

On May 10, 1940, the German offensive began in France, and already on May 15, Holland capitulated, a number of strategic points of which were captured by enemy airborne assault forces. Brussels fell the next day. On May 20, the tank group of General Ewald von Kleist reached the English Channel, and on May 28 the Belgian army capitulated. The main forces of the French army were surrounded in Belgium and Northern France, and by the end of May they had ceased resistance. The English expeditionary army under the command of Lord Gort, who realized the hopelessness of continuing the struggle on the continent, began to withdraw to the port of Dunkirk for subsequent evacuation to the British Isles. By that time, the British had already revealed the secret of the German cipher machines and were reading the negotiations of the German headquarters in the West. This helped the British command to make the right decision.

On May 21, the British Task Force Franklin, consisting of the 5th and 50th divisions, with 74 tanks from the 1st Army Tank Brigade, supported by units of the French 3rd Mechanized Division, launched a counterattack that hit the rear of the 7th Panzer Division and the SS Motorized Division "Dead Head" in the Arras area. On the morning of May 23, the 1st

the French army also launched a counterattack in the direction of Arras, which threatened the encirclement of the Kleist tank group. Kleist reported to Halder on the evening of the 23rd that he had already lost half of his tanks and would not be able to move to Dunkirk until he had eliminated the crisis at Arras. In addition, he said that for the first time the tanks were subjected to sensitive raids. After that, on the evening of May 23, the commander of Army Group A, General Gerd von Rundstedt, ordered on May 24 to suspend the offensive of the Goth and Kleist tank groups in order to pull up forces and clarify the situation. On the morning of May 24, Hitler visited Rundstedt's headquarters. The commander of the army group persuaded the Fuhrer to suspend the advance of the panzer divisions in order to replenish and regroup them. It was necessary to wait for the lagging infantry divisions, which were supposed to fight in cities, for which tanks were of little use. At the same time, the "stop order" (Directive No. 13) confirmed that "the immediate goal of the operations is the destruction of the Franco-British-Belgian troops surrounded in Artois and Flanders through a concentric offensive of our northern wing, as well as the rapid occupation and protection of the sea coast. At the same time, the task of aviation is to break any resistance of the encircled enemy units, prevent the evacuation of British troops through the strait and secure the southern flank of Army Group A "... The

counterattack of two British tank battalions at Arras so frightened the commander of Army Group South Rundstedt that he obtained from Hitler an order on May 24 to stop the advance of German tanks near the English Channel along the Lens-Gravelines line, 16 km from Dunkirk. The "stop order" was explained by the fact that the German command was not sure that the British Expeditionary Force would be immediately evacuated to the British Isles, and would not try, together with the French troops, to hold the Dunkirk bridgehead for a more or less long time, as on that, by the way, insisted the French command. In the event that the second scenario turned out to be true, the panzer divisions would have to be regrouped in order to hit the weaker and much more British demoralized French troops. The counterattack of fresh British armored units led Rundstedt to the idea that a decision had been made to hold

Dunkirk bridgehead. Therefore, a "stop order" was given in order to understand the intentions of the enemy and, depending on them, use Kleist's tank divisions, which suffered significant losses in battles with British armored units. Even if the German tanks had entered Dunkirk, without the support of the infantry, they would have been destroyed by the bulk of the British expeditionary forces approaching the city. The next two days showed that the resistance of the French troops retreating to the coast was significantly weakened, the ports of Boulogne and Calais were taken. It became clear that the enemy was not capable of a large-scale counterattack. At the same time, it turned out that the infantry units were advancing too slowly. Therefore, there was a threat that the Allies would create bridgeheads on the coast for prolonged resistance. On May 26, the headquarters of Army Group B, General Ritter Wilhelm von Leeb, expressed concern that "three major centers of resistance would arise - near Bruges, in the Lille region, Ypres and near Dunkirk, the elimination of which would require a lot of time and effort." To prevent this, the offensive of the German tank groups resumed. Thus, the German command was more afraid not of evacuation, but of a prolonged resistance of the allied forces on the coast of the English Channel.

Two days later, the offensive resumed, but the British managed to hold the approaches to Dunkirk. On May 28 and 29, the Allied troops withdrew to a small bridgehead at Dunkirk. By June 4, 215,000 British soldiers, 114,000 French and 9,000 Belgian soldiers were evacuated. In total, 861 ships took part in the evacuation, including about 300 French, Polish, Dutch, and Norwegian ships. About 240 ships were sunk, including 6 destroyers. 40 thousand French were taken prisoner. The Luftwaffe, contrary to Göring's promise, could not prevent the evacuation. The German attacks were repulsed by British fighters, who shot down 130 German aircraft and lost 106 of their own. Cloudy and rainy weather also helped the British, preventing the Luftwaffe from bombing Dunkirk. The loss of the British corps amounted to 68 thousand killed, wounded and captured. He lost all his artillery (2.5 thousand guns), more than 300 tanks and 64 thousand vehicles, but managed to evacuate the tanks. That the "stop order" did not

really affect the outcome of the evacuation of the British troops is proved by the following facts.

After the Germans stopped, Gort also did not immediately receive an order to retreat. In London, they decided whether there was still a chance to continue the struggle, whether the French would stand, whether it was worth leaving the English army in France. Only on the evening of May 26, on the eve of the resumption of the German offensive, was Gort finally ordered to begin a retreat to Dunkirk with a view to subsequent evacuation. At the same time, the final consent to the evacuation was given to him only on May 27 at one in the afternoon. Here is what the well-known British theorist John Fuller, close to the Ministry of Defense, reports on this matter: slightly north of Cambrai. The northern half of the eastern side of the triangle was held by the Belgian army, which came under heavy bombardment on 24 May. On May 25, she began to give in. The next day, when all hope had disappeared that the French armies south of the Somme would advance north, Lord Gort received the order: by retreating to the coast, save everything that could still be saved from his army. There can be no doubt that if the German panzer groups had continued the unstoppable movement towards Dunkirk on the 24th, the British retreat would have begun correspondingly two days earlier, and not on the morning of May 27, simultaneously with the resumption of the German offensive. It was not about any delays or mistakes, but about completely objective things. The British army, unlike the French or Belgian, did not lose its presence of mind. The forces that Gort had, including 3 tank brigades (the last, 3rd, landed in France on May 25, only to cover the evacuation), armed with heavily armored heavy tanks, were quite enough to hold a small Dunker bridgehead, where the front line was small, and the density of battle formations was maximum, within 10 days necessary to prepare and carry out the evacuation. The calm, clear weather also helped the British. There was no disturbance at sea, and all vessels were used for the evacuation, including light-tonnage schooners, yachts and boats. In addition, British aviation did not cede air supremacy over La

Manshem. The Hurricanes and Spitfires were not inferior to the Messerschmitts, and the British pilots fought no worse than the aces of Hermann Goering. The Germans were unable to prevent the Dunkirk evacuation primarily because of the weakness of their surface and submarine fleet, which did not have enough strength to attack the convoys of evacuating British troops.

The myth of Operation Sea Lion

The main myth associated with Operation Sea Lion is that this operation, involving the landing of the Wehrmacht on the British Isles, was never considered by Hitler as realistically feasible, but was only a means of pressure on England to force her to make peace, and a means of disinformation to cover up Germany's intention to attack the Soviet Union. Before attacking Russia, in order to avoid a war on two fronts, Hitler decided to

do away with England. On July 2, 1940, he ordered the preparation of a landing plan for England, and on July 16 he issued a directive for the preparation of an amphibious landing operation on the British Isles, which was given the code name "Sea Lion". Even before the development of the Sea Lion plan, on June 21, 1940, the General Staff of the Ground Forces informed the fleet command that it was not developing a landing plan in England, since it considered such a landing unfeasible. Also, the Luftwaffe in January 1940 considered the landing in England unfeasible due to the inability to neutralize British aircraft. The Navy, on the contrary, had been developing plans for the invasion of England since mid-November 1939, but only after the surrender of France, which followed on June 22, 1940, did these plans become practical. But on May 21, when the decisive success of the Wehrmacht in France was determined, Hitler discussed with Raeder the possibility of landing in England after the end of the French campaign. The directive dated July 16 stated: "Considering that England, despite her hopeless military

situation, shows no signs of readiness for an agreement, I decided to begin preparations and, if necessary, land troops in England. The purpose of this operation is to eliminate the English metropolis as a base for continuing the war against Germany and, if necessary, completely capture it. German troops were to cross the English Channel, land between Dover and Portsmouth as part of 25 divisions, and then advance to cut off London.

The front was supposed to stretch from Folkestone to Bognor. Rundstedt, who had just been promoted to field marshal, was to command the invasion army.

Already on July 17, an order was given to deploy thirteen divisions on the English Channel coast, which were supposed to make up the first wave of the invasion of 260 thousand people. In the first echelon, it was supposed to land 90 thousand. Field Marshal Walter von Brauchitsch, the commander-in-chief of the ground forces, expected to complete the entire operation within a month, and the stubborn resistance of the British troops was expected only during the first two weeks. However, the landing was supposed to be on a wide front of 200 miles, which, according to Raeder's conclusion, the German fleet could not carry out. In order to land 90 thousand soldiers with military equipment on such a front, 1722 barges, 1161 motor boats, 471 tugboats and 155 transports were required. Even if this armada could be concentrated in the ports of the English Channel (and it really was done), the Luftwaffe would not be able to protect them in the ports from British air strikes, and even more so at sea during the landing period from the attacks of the

British fleet. By mid-September, the British already had 20 combat-ready divisions, including three tank divisions, and one tank brigade. These forces should have been enough to stop the advance of the first wave of invasion. And then one could hope that the Royal Air Force and Navy would destroy the German landing craft and force the invading army to capitulate. For an immediate landing at the end of July, the fleet simply did not have the necessary vehicles in the English Channel region, since no one planned the Sea Lion until the end of the French campaign and therefore did not collect landing craft in advance.

At a meeting on July 21, Raeder proposed moving Operation Sea Lion to May 1941. However, Hitler reasonably objected that by this time the German fleet would still not be able to close the gap with the British fleet, and the British land army would certainly have strengthened by then. And he ordered to prepare the operation by mid-September. Its beginning at this time or postponed to May 1941 depended on whether the Luftwaffe could inflict British

aviation and navy, as well as the military industry, are so damaged that they will not be able to effectively counteract the landing.

As a prerequisite for the landing, the Fuhrer demanded: "English aviation must be so morally and actually suppressed that it can no longer oppose the crossing of German troops as a force worthy of mention ... It is advisable to pin down the British naval forces shortly before the crossing, both in the North and in the Mediterranean, where the Italians would operate. Already now we must try to inflict damage on the British fleet with the help of aircraft and torpedo attacks. To achieve these goals, a massive air attack on Britain was undertaken.

The command of the German ground forces insisted that the invading army should consist of 40 divisions. However, the commander-in-chief of the fleet, Grand Admiral Erich von Raeder, insisted that the landing force should not exceed 25 divisions, otherwise the fleet would not be able to supply it. In this case, the landing, however, would not have had a numerical superiority over the British army, which reduced the chances of success.

On August 13, the chief of staff of the operational leadership, Jodl, in a memorandum, called the guaranteed exclusion of the British fleet from the landing area and the complete air supremacy of the Luftwaffe over the entire territory of England as mandatory conditions for the Sea Lion. Both of these conditions were practically impossible to fulfill. Even if the air attack on England were successful, the Luftwaffe would not be able to completely neutralize British aircraft. And to inflict heavy losses on the fleet hiding in remote bases, Germany did not have

aircraft carrier

aviation. On August 16, the Fuhrer decided to abandon the landing in Lyme Bay, so that the landing would be carried out with smaller forces

and on a narrower front. An OKW directive of 27 August, signed by Keitel, laid down the final plans for landing in four main areas on the south coast between Folkestone and Selsey Bill and east of Portsmouth, in order to capture the line of Portsmouth, Thames, east of London at Gravesend; this frontier had to be reached immediately

same, as soon as the bridgeheads connect and the troops can strike north. At the same time, a demonstration concentration of floating craft was carried out against the east coast of England, which on D-Day were supposed to head to the proposed landing areas, and halfway to lie on the return course.

On September 1, the concentration of landing craft in the ports of the English Channel began. Previously, they were afraid to do this because of the threat of British bombing. On September 3, 1940, Hitler designated September 21 as the day of Operation Sea Lion. He expected that by then the British fighters would have been neutralized. The transports were to go to sea on September 20, and the final order to start the operation was to be given on September 11. On September 7, 625 bombers escorted by 648 fighters made the most massive raid on London. Many saw it as a prelude to an invasion. However, already on September 10, the British Air Force began to inflict sensitive blows on German transports.

On September 13, light ships of the British fleet bombarded Ostend, Calais, Boulogne and Cherbourg, and aircraft sank 80 barges in Ostend. It became clear that the British aviation had not been destroyed and remained combat-ready. And on September 15, during an even more powerful raid on London, the Luftwaffe lost 56 aircraft, and several dozen more were seriously damaged. A quarter of all bombers were disabled. It was the defeat of the Luftwaffe in the Battle of Britain. Therefore, the German invasion of England had to be postponed indefinitely on September 17th. Hitler's decision was also facilitated by the heavy losses that British aircraft inflicted on German ships concentrated in the ports of the English Channel. By that time, 21 transports out of 170 and 214 landing barges out of 1918 had been sunk or damaged. Already on September 18, an order had to be given to disperse the transports so as not to expose them to enemy bombs. On October 12, it was announced that the invasion was postponed to the spring of 1941, but no one believed in its success.

It must be emphasized that until September 1940, Operation Sea Lion was considered by Hitler as a very real project. This is proved by the fact that the main forces of the Luftwaffe were involved in its implementation and concentrated

formidable amphibious fleet. However, in the absence of air supremacy, this fleet, even in the event of a successful landing, would be very quickly destroyed by British aircraft and navies, which the weak German navy would not have been able to resist. The German troops on the British coast would be left without supplies and would soon be forced to capitulate. This is exactly what happened to the German-Italian troops in Tunisia three years later, in May 1943. There is no doubt that Hitler would indeed have launched Operation Sea Lion in September 1940 if the Luftwaffe had by then succeeded in gaining air supremacy over the British Isles. Formally, Operation Sea Lion was canceled by Hitler only on January 9, 1941. However, from the end of

September 1940, when the loss of an air battle over England ruled out a successful landing on the British Isles, Operation Sea Lion began to be used as a disinformation cover for a future German attack on the USSR.

Myth of the Battle of Britain

The main myth of the Battle of Britain is that it was lost to the Luftwaffe due to the mistakes of Göring and other German air leaders and that Germany had a chance to win it if the right strategy was adopted. In order to gain air supremacy

necessary for Operation Sea Lion, the Luftwaffe launched a massive attack on England from July 9, 1940, gradually increasing its strikes. The initial targets were coastal convoys and the port of Dover, but gradually the geography and targets of the bombing expanded.

On August 1, 1940, Hitler issued Directive No. 17 "On the conduct of air and sea war against England." It said: "In order to create the preconditions for the final defeat of England, I intend to wage an air and sea war against England in a more acute form than hitherto. For this I order:

1. The German air force, with all the means at their disposal, to defeat the British aviation as soon as possible ...
2. Upon achieving temporary or local air superiority, continue aviation operations against harbors, especially against structures intended for storing food supplies ... Raids on the ports of the southern coast should be carried out, taking into account the planned operation, on the smallest possible scale ...
3. To conduct an intensified air war in such a way that aviation could at any time be involved in supporting the operations of the navy ... In addition, it must maintain its combat capability for Operation Sea Lion.
4. Terrorist raids in retaliation remain within my purview." A new offensive was supposed to begin on August 5, but

really massive strikes began after 15 August.

For the battle for England, the Luftwaffe had 929 fighters, 875 bombers and 315 dive bombers in the 2nd and 3rd air fleets,

based in Northern France, Belgium and Holland, and 123 bombers and 34 fighters of the 5th Air Fleet in Norway. The RAF could only field 700 fighters and 500 bombers. However, the British had one decisive advantage. Their aircraft operated from airfields in southern England and could quickly return to their bases to replenish fuel and ammunition, thus making several sorties a day. German planes operated at the limit of their radius and could not make more than one flight daily. In addition, the downed British planes had a much better chance of reaching their bases than the German ones, many of which fell on the way back into the waters of the English Channel. Also, British pilots who escaped from downed vehicles by parachute, as a rule, returned to service, while their German counterparts were sent to prisoner of war camps until the end of the war. The British Spitfires were no worse than the German Me-109s, and the heavy losses of experienced Luftwaffe pilots quickly equalized the positions of the parties in terms of the level of combat training of pilots. The British were also greatly helped by radar. As soon as the German planes took off from the airfields in Western Europe, radars detected them already at a distance of 200 km and very accurately determined the course of the flight, so that the British fighters were already waiting for them in front of the targets.

On August 12, British radars were raided, but only one of them was seriously damaged. On August 13 and 14, 1,500 Luftwaffe vehicles bombed British airfields, but the result was completely insignificant. Only 13 British aircraft were destroyed with the loss of 47 German ones. On August 15, 800 aircraft bombed the south coast of England. Expecting that all the forces of the British fighter aviation were pulled there, 100 bombers, accompanied by 34 fighters - twin-engined Me-110s of the 5th Fleet - tried to attack the east coast, but were intercepted by seven squadrons of Hurricanes and Spitfires, which were carrying heavy Me-110s. 210 could not resist due to poor maneuverability and lower speed. The British suffered no losses, and the Germans lost 30 vehicles. And in the south of England that day, the Germans lost 75 aircraft against 34 British. The lack of heavy strategic bombers among the Germans limited the bomb load and forced

conduct mainly targeted bombing from low altitudes, which made the bombers vulnerable to air defense systems. On August

24, the Luftwaffe switched to the destruction of sector stations - underground control centers that guide aircraft to targets. From that day until September 6, strikes were carried out mainly against RAF targets. Five forward fighter airfields in the south of England were heavily damaged, and six of the seven key sector stations were heavily bombed. Until September 6, the British lost 295 aircraft and 103 pilots. Another 170 vehicles were damaged. Germans - 385 aircraft, including 214 fighters. The Luftwaffe then switched to the bombing of London. This was seen as direct preparation for an invasion. The calculation was that the massive raids would cause panic in the British capital and the refugees would clog the roads, limiting the ability to transfer British troops to repel the German landing. On the evening and night of September 7, London was bombed by 625 bombers and 648 fighters. 842 people were killed and 2347 wounded. The British fighters missed this raid, and the losses of the Luftwaffe were negligible. But a daylight raid on London on 15 September ended in disaster. 200 bombers, escorted by 600 fighters, were attacked by Spitfires and Hurricanes guided by radar. 56 German aircraft were shot down, including 34 bombers. The British lost 26 aircraft. After that, the Germans switched exclusively to night raids on London, but they had only moral, not strategic value, since Operation Sea Lion was postponed indefinitely. On November 14, 1940, as part of this strategy aimed at undermining the morale of the British, Coventry was subjected to a brutal bombardment, but this no longer had military significance. In the second half of November, massive raids on England were stopped.

In total, by the end of October 1940, when the air "Battle of Britain" ended, the Germans irrevocably lost 1733 aircraft, and the British - only 915. At the same time, the British could more easily make up for losses in aircraft, since British factories produced

9924 cars, and the German ones - only 8070. Even more difficult were the irretrievable losses of the Luftwaffe in the pilots. The reason for the defeat of the Luftwaffe was not a frequent change of strategy, but the action of permanent long-term factors of the geographical advantage of the British in the form of the proximity of bases, the presence of radars and sector stations. In conditions of approximate qualitative equality of the fighters of the parties, these advantages more than compensated for the numerical superiority of the Luftwaffe. The frequent change of strategy by Goering was caused by the gradual exhaustion of forces and the constant search for weak points in England. Growing losses made it impossible to continue those strategies to which the British had already managed to adapt.

The myth of the voluntary annexation of the Baltic states to the USSR

The main myth associated with the accession of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia to the USSR in 1939-1940 is that this accession was voluntary and was not connected with secret additional protocols to the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and to the Soviet-German Treaty of Friendship and border dated September 28, 1939, according to which all the Baltic states were included in the Soviet sphere of interests. In fact, it was precisely by implementing the Soviet-

German secret agreements that the Soviet Union, as early as the autumn of 1939, began preparations for the annexation of the Baltic countries. After the Red Army occupied the eastern provinces in Poland, the USSR began to border on all the Baltic states. Soviet troops were moved to the borders of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. At the end of September, these countries were offered, in an ultimatum form, to conclude treaties of friendship and mutual assistance with the USSR. On September 24, Molotov told Estonian Foreign Minister Karl Selter, who arrived in Moscow: "The Soviet Union needs an expansion of its security system, for which it needs access to the Baltic Sea ... Do not force the Soviet Union to use force in order to achieve its goals." On September 25, Stalin informed the German ambassador, Count Friedrich Werner von der Schulenburg,

that "the Soviet Union will immediately take up the solution of the problem of the Baltic states in accordance with the protocol of August 23." Mutual assistance treaties with the Baltic states were concluded under the threat of the use of force. On

September 28, a Soviet-Estonian mutual assistance pact was signed. A 25,000-strong Soviet military contingent was introduced into the territory of Estonia. Stalin told Selter on his departure from Moscow: "It could work out with you, as with Poland. Poland was a great power. Where is Poland now?"

On October 5, a mutual assistance pact was signed with Latvia. A 25,000-strong Soviet military contingent entered the country. And on October 10, an "Agreement on the transfer of the city of Vilna and the Vilna region to the Republic of Lithuania and on mutual assistance between the Soviet Union and Lithuania" was signed with Lithuania. When Lithuanian Foreign Minister Juozas Urbšys declared that the proposed terms of the treaty were tantamount to the occupation of Lithuania, Stalin countered that "the Soviet Union does not intend to threaten the independence of Lithuania. Vice versa. The introduction of Soviet troops will be a genuine guarantee for Lithuania that the Soviet Union will protect it in the event of an attack, so that the troops will serve the security of Lithuania itself. And he added with a grin: "Our garrisons will help you put down the communist uprising if it happens in Lithuania." 20 thousand

Red Army soldiers also entered Lithuania. After Germany defeated France with lightning speed in May 1940, Stalin decided to expedite the annexation of the Baltic states and Bessarabia. On June 4, strong groupings of Soviet troops under the guise of exercises began to advance to the borders of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. On June 14, Lithuania, and on June 16, Latvia and Estonia were presented with ultimatums of a similar content with a demand to allow significant Soviet military contingents, 9-12 divisions in each of the countries, to enter their territory and to form new, pro-Soviet governments with the participation of the Communists, although the number Communist parties in each of the republics consisted of 100-200 people. The pretext for the ultimatums was provocations allegedly carried out against the Soviet troops stationed in the Baltic states. But this pretext was sewn with white thread. It was alleged, for example, that the Lithuanian police kidnapped two Soviet tankers, Shmovgonets and Nosov. But already on May 27, they returned to their unit and stated that they were kept in the basement for a day, trying to get information about the Soviet tank brigade. At the same time, Nosov mysteriously turned into Pisarev. The ultimatums

were accepted. On June 15, Soviet troops entered Lithuania, and on June 17 - in Latvia and Estonia. In Lithuania, President Antanas Smetana demanded that the ultimatum be rejected and armed

resistance, but, not having received the support of the majority of the cabinet, he fled to

Germany. The armies of the Baltic states could not really offer armed resistance to Soviet aggression either in the autumn of 1939, or even more so in the summer of 1940. In the three countries, in the event of mobilization, 360,000 people could be put under arms. However, unlike Finland, the Baltics did not have their own military industry, there were not even sufficient stocks of small arms to arm so many people. If Finland could also receive supplies of weapons and military equipment through Sweden and Norway, then the way to the Baltic States through the Baltic Sea was closed by the Soviet fleet, and Germany complied with the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and refused to help the Baltic states. In addition, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia did not have border fortifications, and their territory was much more accessible for invasion than the territory of Finland covered with forests and swamps.

The new pro-Soviet governments held elections to local parliaments on the principle of one candidate from an unbreakable bloc of non-partisans per seat. Moreover, this block in all three Baltic states was called the same - "Union of the working people", and the elections were held on the same day - July 14. People in civilian clothes who were present at the polling stations took note of those who crossed out candidates or threw empty ballots into the ballot boxes. The Nobel laureate Polish writer Czeslaw Milosz, who was in Lithuania at the time, recalled: "It was possible to vote in the elections for the only official list of the 'working people' - with the same programs in all three republics. I had to vote, as each voter was stamped in his passport. The absence of a stamp certifies that the owner of the passport is an enemy of the people who evaded the elections and thereby revealed his enemy essence. Naturally, the Communists received more than 90% of the votes in all three republics - 92.8% in Estonia, 97% in Latvia, and even 99% in Lithuania! The turnout was also impressive - 84% in Estonia, 95% in Latvia and 95.5% in Lithuania.

Not surprisingly, on July 21–22, three parliaments approved a declaration on Estonia's entry into the USSR. By the way, all these acts contradicted the constitutions of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, where

It was said that the issues of independence and changes in the state system can only be resolved through a popular referendum. But in Moscow they were in a hurry to annex the Baltic States and did not pay attention to formalities. The Supreme Soviet of the USSR satisfied the appeals written in Moscow for admission to the Union of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia in the period from 3 to 6 August

1940. At first, many Latvians, Lithuanians and Estonians saw the Red Army as a defense against German aggression. The workers were happy to reopen businesses that had been dormant due to the World War and the resulting crisis. However, soon, already in November 1940, the population of the Baltic states was completely ruined. Then local currencies were equated to the ruble at sharply undervalued rates. Also, the nationalization of industry and trade led to inflation and a shortage of goods. The redistribution of land from the more prosperous to the poorest peasants, the forced relocation of farmers to villages, and repressions against the clergy and intelligentsia provoked armed resistance. Detachments of "forest brothers" appeared, so named in memory of the rebels of 1905. And already in August 1940, the deportations of Jews and other national minorities began, and on June 14, 1941, the turn came to Lithuanians, Latvians and Estonians. On the eve of the Great Patriotic War, 10 thousand people were deported from Estonia, 17.5 thousand people from Lithuania and 16.9 thousand people from Latvia. The

capture of the Baltic countries by the Soviet Union was fundamentally no different from the German capture of Austria in 1938, Czechoslovakia in 1939 and Luxembourg and Denmark in 1940, also carried out peacefully. The fact of occupation (in the sense of the seizure of territory against the will of the population of these countries), which was a violation of international law and an act of aggression, was recognized as a crime at the Nuremberg trials and imputed to the main Nazi war criminals. As in the case of the Baltic states, the Anschluss of Austria was preceded by an ultimatum to establish a pro-German government in Vienna, headed by the Nazi Seyss-Inquart. And already it invited German troops to Austria, which previously were not in the country at all. The annexation of Austria was carried out in such a way that it was immediately incorporated into the Reich and divided into several Reichsgau

(areas). Similarly, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, after a short period of occupation, were included in the USSR as union republics. The Czech Republic, Denmark and Norway were turned into protectorates, which did not prevent them both during the war and after it from talking about these countries as occupied by Germany. This formulation was also reflected in the verdict of the Nuremberg trials of the main Nazi war criminals in 1946.

The Russian government still does not recognize the fact of the Soviet occupation of the Baltic states and claims that the entry of troops in June 1940 was not directly related to the subsequent annexation of the Baltic states. In Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, the entry of Soviet troops and the subsequent annexation of the Baltic countries to the USSR is considered one of the many Stalinist crimes.

Myth of Katyn

The main myth associated with the execution of Polish officers in Katyn and other places lies in the allegations, circulated for decades until the end of the 80s of the 20th century by Soviet propaganda and officials, that the Poles were shot by the Germans in the autumn of 1941. However, the attempt to attribute this atrocity to the Nazis at the Nuremberg trials of the main war criminals in 1945-1946 suffered a complete failure, since the defense of the defendants managed to prove that those perpetrators to whom the Soviet prosecution attributed this crime either did not exist at all, or in no way could it commit. During the occupation of Western Ukraine and Western Belarus by the Soviet troops, about a quarter of a million Polish soldiers, 8.5 thousand officers and 6.5 thousand policemen and justice workers were captured by the Red Army. A significant part of the rank

and file - natives of the regions occupied by the Red Army - were sent home. Officers and policemen were concentrated in three camps - Ostashkov (6.5 thousand, mostly policemen) in the Kalinin region, Starobelsk (about 4 thousand) in the Voroshilovograd region and Kozelsk (4.7 thousand) in the Smolensk region. On February 20, 1940, the head of the NKVD Directorate for Prisoners of War, Pyotr Karpovich Soprunenko, presented Beria with proposals according to which 400 civilians were to be transferred to the regional departments of the NKVD for consideration of their cases. 400-500 officers - residents of the western regions of Ukraine and Belarus, who did not have "compromising materials." At the end of February, the rest of the captured officers began to be prepared for transfer to Kamchatka with sentences from the Special Meeting: from 3 to 8 years in the camps. However, on March 5, 1940, the Politburo, on the proposal of the NKVD (which was drawn up after the decision was made by the highest party body), decided "the case of those in the camps

prisoners of war 14,700 people of former Polish officers, officials, landlords, policemen, intelligence officers, gendarmes, osadniks (Polish peasants settled on Ukrainian and Belarusian lands after 1920. - B.S.), as well as cases of those arrested **and** in Western prisons regions of Ukraine and Belarus in the amount of 11,000 members of various k-p espionage and sabotage organizations, former landowners, manufacturers, former Polish officers, officials and defectors - to be considered in a special order, with the application of capital punishment to them - execution. Consideration of cases should be carried out without summoning the arrested and without bringing charges, a decision to end the investigation and an indictment ... ". Almost 25 thousand people were going to be shot only on the basis

of certificates compiled by the NKVD. Shot during April and the first half of May 1940 a little less. Executions took place in April and the first half of May 1940 in the Katyn forest, near the village of Mednoe and in the forested area of Kharkov. The rush to execute was linked to Stalin's plan to attack Hitler in the summer of 1940, after which Poland became a Soviet ally. The legend launched in recent years in Russian journalism that the murder in Katyn was revenge for the murder of 60,000 Red Army prisoners in Polish camps in 1920 has nothing to do with reality. In the Soviet-Polish war of 1920, out of 130 thousand Soviet prisoners, 18-20 thousand people died. They were not shot, but became victims of epidemics and malnutrition. There are no references to the events of 1920 in the Politburo documents of 1939–1940.

Of the 14,854 prisoners in Ostashkov, Starobelsk and Kozelsk, about 400 survived. 24 officers of German origin were transferred to Germany, and 19 officers of Lithuanian origin to Lithuania. 138 officers were spared their lives as being of operational interest. Another 167 survived for other reasons. Among them were NKVD informers, 40 doctors, and a group of officers led by Colonel Zygmunt Berling, who expressed their readiness for political cooperation with the USSR without the sanction of the Polish government in London. Of the civilians imprisoned in the prisons of Ukraine and Belarus, 7,305 people were shot. About

This was reported to Khrushchev by the then chairman of the KGB Alexander Shelepin, pointing out that in total, including officers from Ostashkov, Starobilsk and Kozelsk, 21,857 people were shot. Now the government of Ukraine has provided a list of executed civilians for 3.5 thousand people who were in Ukrainian prisons. The authorities of Belarus have not yet provided the Polish side with such a list. After Hitler's attack on the

USSR, the Polish government in London more than once asked Moscow about the fate of the prisoners, with whom communication was interrupted in the spring of 1940. The answers were vague, to the point that the officers were sent ... to Manchuria. In April 1943, in the Katyn forest near Smolensk, the Germans discovered the graves of Poles from the Kozelsky camp and blamed the USSR for this crime. They claimed that more than 12 thousand people were buried in Katyn, that is, almost all the officers who fell into Soviet captivity. In reality, only about 4,350 people were shot in Katyn. A commission of the Polish and International Red Cross, which included members of the underground connected with the Polish government in London, established that the execution took place in the spring of 1940, when the area was under Soviet control. An international commission set up by the Germans, with the participation of experts from countries allied to the Reich and neutral Switzerland, came to the same conclusion.

England and the United States, in order to preserve the alliance with the USSR, supported the Soviet version that the execution was carried out in the autumn of 1941, after the Germans had occupied Smolensk. But in official correspondence, officials of the British Foreign Office back in 1943 expressed confidence that the execution at Katyn was the work of the Soviet hands. After the Smolensk region was liberated from German troops in the fall of 1943, a "Special Commission to determine and study the circumstances of the execution of Polish officers of prisoners of war by the Nazi invaders in the Katyn forest" was sent to the burial site, headed by Academician Nikolai Burdenko. She carried out a second exhumation and in January 1944 published a "Special Communication" where she blamed the Germans. The time of execution was dated in the fall of 1941, when German troops were already on the territory of the Katyn Forest.

In 1948, hearings on the Katyn case were held in the US Congress. The surviving Polish officers from the Kozelsky camp kept lists in which they noted which of their comrades left the camp on what day. When these lists were compared with the exhumation data at Katyn, it turned out that those who left the Kozelsky camp on the same day ended up in the same Katyn grave. Since it was absolutely unbelievable that the Germans shot the Poles in the same batches that the NKVD officers took them from the camp, there was no doubt about Soviet guilt. Since the late 40s, few in the Western world have doubted that Katyn was the work of the NKVD, but no official charges were brought against the Soviet Union.

In March 1989, at the request of the communist leaders of Poland, who were living out their last months in power, the Politburo of the Central Committee of the CPSU instructed the prosecutor's office and the KGB to return to the investigation of the circumstances of the Katyn case.

January 22, 1991 Prosecutor General of the USSR Nikolai Turbin of the Politburo: "The collected materials indicate that the prisoners of war were sent by escort units of the Main Convoy Directorate of the NKVD of the USSR by rail for 90-100-125 people, respectively, 2-3 wagons from April 3 to May 16, 1940". Only on May 17, 1991, Turbin, in a letter to Gorbachev, ventured "to draw a preliminary conclusion that Polish prisoners of war could be shot on the basis of a decision of the Special Meeting of the NKVD of the USSR during April-May 1940 in the UNKVD of the Smolensk, Kharkov and Kalinin regions and buried respectively in Katyn forest near Smolensk, near the village of Mednoe, 32 km from the city of Tver and in the 6th quarter of the forest park zone of Kharkov. And he said that he had given preliminary consent to the Polish prosecutor's office for a joint exhumation at the alleged burial sites in August 1991. The exhumation in the forested area of Kharkov took place from July 25 to August 9, and in Medny - from August 15 to 31, during the days of the August coup. On August 19, on the first day of the coup, the leaders of the local KGB tried to stop the work, but the investigation team, headed by the head of the investigation team, Colonel A. V. Tretetsky and the assistant to the Chief Military Prosecutor, Colonel of Justice N. L. Anisimov, completed the work.

In 1992, documents from the Presidential Archive were published in Russia, indicating that the decision to execute Polish officers was made at a meeting of the Politburo on March 5, 1940. All members of the Politburo present at the meeting voted "for": Joseph Stalin, Kliment Voroshilov, Vyacheslav Molotov and Anastas Mikoyan. Mikhail Kalinin and Lazar Kaganovich were not present at the meeting, but spoke in favor. Despite the recognition of Soviet responsibility for the crimes in Katyn, Medny and Kharkov, the Russian authorities have not yet recognized their legal responsibility for what happened as the legal successors of the USSR and have not resolved the issue of paying compensation to the families of the dead Poles.

The myth of the voluntary annexation of Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina to the USSR

The main myth associated with the voluntary accession to the Soviet Union of Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina, formerly part of the territory of Romania, is that this accession took place according to the clearly expressed will of the local population and without any connection with the secret additional protocol to the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, according to which Bessarabia was assigned to the Soviet sphere of interests. In fact, these territories were annexed under

the threat of the use of military force, and the will of the local population to join the USSR was never expressed. Bessarabia was annexed to Romania by the 1918 Treaty of Bucharest with Germany and its allies and the 1919 Treaty of Saint-Germain with Austria. Until 1918, Bessarabia was part of the Russian Empire and the Russian Republic, and Bukovina was an Austrian province. The USSR did not recognize the annexation of Bessarabia, although it repeatedly expressed its readiness to recognize Bessarabia as Romanian territory if Romania agreed to waive the demand for the return of the Romanian gold reserves, which was transferred to Russia for temporary storage in 1916-1917 after the occupation of most of the territory of Romania by the troops of the Central Powers. In 1924, on the left bank of the Dniester, along which the then Soviet-Romanian border passed, the Moldavian ASSR was created, in which ethnic Moldavians (Romanians) were a minority and which was seen as a springboard for the return of Bessarabia and the future creation of the Moldavian SSR. In August 1928, Romania joined the Briand-Kellogg Pact, in which the Soviet Union also participated and which provided for the rejection of war as a means of the state's foreign policy. According to the secret additional protocol to the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, the USSR received Bessarabia in its sphere of influence. However, about the North

Bukovina was not mentioned in any of the secret Soviet-German protocols, but after the occupation of this territory by the Red Army, Hitler did not raise a fuss, since he was not yet ready for war with the Soviet Union. On April 9, the NKID protested to the Romanian authorities about the alleged 15 shelling of Soviet border posts from Romanian territory and the mining of bridges across the Dniester that had begun. In May, a partial mobilization of Romanian troops was announced. On May 11, the headquarters of the Kyiv military district ordered a set of mobilization sets of maps of the Romanian border zone. On June 1, Germany warned Romania that it would remain neutral in the event of a Soviet-Romanian armed conflict, although it continued to supply Bucharest with captured Polish weapons in exchange for oil. On the same day, Romania offered the USSR to expand trade, but was refused. On June 9, by order of the People's Commissariat of Defense, to prepare an operation against Romania, the Southern Front Directorate was created, headed by General G.K. Zhukov, and the next day, Soviet troops began to advance to the border.

On June 23, Molotov announced to the German ambassador Schulenburg about the intention of the USSR in the near future to annex not only Bessarabia, but also Northern Bukovina, and promised to take into account German economic interests in Romania. Schulenburg stated that since Bukovina did not appear in the secret protocol, he should request Berlin. On June 25 Moscow received a reply on behalf of Ribbentrop. He declared that the claims to Bukovina were unexpected, asked that the interests of the Germans living there and in Bessarabia be taken into account, but assured that Germany would abide by the non-aggression pact. At the same time, Ribbentrop expressed his readiness to influence Romania in terms of the peaceful cession of these territories, so that Romania would not turn into a theater of war. On the same day, the troops of the Southern Front received a directive on political work during the

war with Romania. On June 26, 1940, the Soviet government, in an ultimatum form, demanded that Romania transfer Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina, predominantly populated by Ukrainians, to the USSR. On June 27, mobilization was announced in Romania, but Bucharest, on the advice of Berlin, accepted the ultimatum on the night of the 28th. On the morning

The army, without meeting resistance, entered the territory of Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina and on June 30 reached the new border on the Prut River. The entry of troops lasted for six days and was slowed down due to frequent breakdowns of Soviet tanks and vehicles. On July 3, the new border with Romania was finally closed from the Soviet side. Those Romanian soldiers who did not have time to cross the Prut were disarmed and captured.

No own authorities that would ask for the admission of these territories to the USSR were created in Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina. The activities of the Moldovan and Ukrainian Soviet and party organs were immediately extended to them. On August 2, 1940, the Moldavian SSR was formed, which included 6 out of 9 districts of Bessarabia and 6 out of 14 districts of the Moldavian ASSR. The remaining territories of Bessarabia and the Moldavian ASSR, as well as Northern Bukovina, became part of the Ukrainian

SSR. Initially, the population did not show hostility to the Soviet troops. However, forced collectivization, the closing of churches, shortages of goods and repressions against the intelligentsia and members of the propertied classes changed the situation. In the spring and summer of 1941, about 30 thousand people of "anti-Soviet elements" were deported from Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina. On April 1, 1941, the first secretary of the Communist Party of Ukraine, Nikita Khrushchev, informed Stalin: "Some of the peasants of the nearest four villages of the Glyboksky district of the Chernivtsi region went to the regional center, the village of Glybokoe, with a demand to send them to Romania. The crowd numbered about one thousand people, mostly men. In the middle of the day on April 1, the crowd entered the village of Glybokoye, approached the building of the regional department of the NKVD, some carried crosses, there was one white banner (which, as the participants in this procession themselves explained, was supposed to symbolize peaceful intentions). An inscription was pasted on one cross: "Look, brothers, these are the crosses that the Red Army soldiers crippled" ... At about 19:00 on April 1, a crowd of 500-600 people in the Glybok region tried to break into Romania. The border guards opened fire. As a result, according to preliminary data, about 50 people were killed and wounded, the rest fled. Nobody br

Stalin replied to Khrushchev: "In general, from your message it is clear that your work in the border areas is going very badly. Of course, you can shoot people, but shooting is not the main method of our work. With the

beginning of the Great Patriotic War, most of the mobilized Moldovans (Romanians) of Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina voluntarily surrendered to the Romanian troops. Here, the Romanians took more than 80 thousand prisoners, who were immediately dismissed to their homes and partially drafted into their army. It is also worth noting that during the Great Patriotic War, out of 2,892 people who participated in the Soviet partisan movement in Moldova, there were only seven ethnic Moldovans. The indigenous population of Bessarabia clearly considered the return to the bosom of Romania as a boon in comparison with the Soviet occupation, providing an opportunity to partisan against the Germans to the encircled Red Army soldiers and the Soviet and party workers sent here. And the well-known song about the "dark-skinned Moldavian woman" gathering a Moldavian partisan detachment, written in 1940 just in connection with the annexation of Bessarabia to the USSR, is nothing more than a poetic image that has nothing to do with reality.

The myth that Stalin was afraid of Hitler

One of the most common myths of both Soviet and Russian and foreign historiography is that on the eve of the Great Patriotic War, Stalin was afraid of Hitler, at all costs sought to delay the German attack on the USSR, and therefore, until the last moment, did not put the troops of the border districts on alert.

In fact, the reasons for the unpreparedness to repel the German invasion were both in the systemic reasons for the low combat capability and combat readiness of the Red Army, associated with the Soviet totalitarian system, and with the fact that Stalin was preparing it not for defense, but for an attack on Germany. As early as February 26, 1940, when England and France were considering the possibility of entering the Soviet-Finnish war on the side of Finland and were preparing to send an expeditionary force to help the Finns, the Baltic Fleet received a directive to consider not them, but a coalition consisting of Germany, Italy, Hungary and Finland. Stalin thought of attacking Germany after the start of the general offensive of the Wehrmacht in the West, which was expected in the spring of 1940. Therefore, he was in a hurry to end the war with Finland, refusing to seize this country. The liberated troops, including all aviation, were rapidly transferred to the western borders. Captured Polish officers were executed in Katyn. In the event of a war with Germany, they would have to be released and handed over to the Polish government in exile in London - an ally in the fight against Hitler. Stalin did not want the creation of a Polish army that was not controlled by the USSR. Until the beginning of July 1940, the deadline for the demobilization of those called up for the Finnish war was postponed. Stalin expected that by that time the Wehrmacht would be bogged down on the Maginot Line. At that moment, Hitler could oppose only 12 weakened infantry divisions to 97 Soviet rifle and cavalry divisions and 17 tank brigades. On the night of May 7, 1940, Stalin was at a friendly party with the deputy head of his guard

Alexandra Egnatashvili. Egnatashvili's wife, whose sister lived in America, asked: "Are we going to fight America?" Stalin raised a glass of wine in response and solemnly proclaimed: "We will not go to war with America. We will go to war with Germany, and England and America will be our allies." However, France collapsed in two weeks, before the end of May. Stalin postponed the march to the West. Khrushchev recalled: "I was with Stalin during the capitulation of France. He swore juicy, in Russian, saying: you see, Hitler untied his hands in the West. Now

the main forces of the Wehrmacht could resist the Red Army, and if successful, it would open up the possibility of occupying all of Western Europe. For this purpose, Stalin began to deploy mechanized and airborne corps. However, at the same time he formed 29 mechanized corps, each of which was supposed to have more than a thousand tanks. For such a large number of corps, neither experienced personnel, nor means of communication and logistics support were enough, and the mechanized corps turned out to be poorly controlled and not very combat-ready. From October 1940, measures were taken to form a Polish division of the Red Army from "correctly politically minded" prisoners of war. According to Marshal Zhukov, at the beginning of 1941, in response to my report that the Germans had stepped up their air, intelligence and ground reconnaissance, JV Stalin said: "They are afraid of us. I'll tell you a secret, our

ambassador had a serious conversation personally with Hitler, and he confidentially informed him: - Please don't worry when you receive

information about the concentration of our troops in Poland. Our troops will undergo extensive retraining for particularly important missions in the West."

Stalin believed that Hitler himself was afraid of a Soviet attack and therefore was concentrating troops on the

border. In March 1941, a plan for strategic deployment in the West was prepared, providing for the main attack in southern Poland. On it, the first deputy chief of the General Staff, General Nikolai Vatutin, left a resolution that the offensive of the Southwestern Front should begin on June 12, 1941. However, the capacity of the Soviet railways was

2.5 times lower than the German ones, and did not have time to concentrate troops by the specified date. In mid-May, a plan was developed for a preventive strike, justified by the fact that "Germany has the ability to warn us in the deployment and deliver a surprise strike." However, they did not prepare to repel such a blow, which suggests that the words about a possible German aggression were only propaganda rhetoric. In the same way, in 1939, the attack on Finland was prepared as a "counterstrike", although only a madman could think of a Finnish attack on the USSR. In the May plan, only the intention was real to "preempt the enemy and attack the German army at the moment when it will be in the deployment stage and will not have time to organize the front and the interaction of troops." 152 Soviet divisions were to defeat 100 German divisions on the Krakow-Katowice front. In reality, only 31 divisions would have opposed the Soviet troops here, while the most powerful German Army Group Center would have hit the flank of the advancing Soviet troops.

Judging by the timing of the advance of the troops, the offensive was scheduled for July 1941. On June 4, the Politburo decided to form a Polish division of the Red Army by July 1, 1941 from "persons who know the Polish language."

Similarly, a month before the attack on Finland, the Finnish Corps of the Red Army began to form. The Germans, in May 1941, began to form the Ukrainian battalions Roland and Nachtigal. By July 1, all divisions of the Soviet border districts were to advance to the border, and by July 20, all Soviet aircraft were to be painted in summer camouflage. On June 20, the Main Military Council approved a draft directive on political work among the troops, which emphasized: "Every day and hour, an attack by the imperialists on the Soviet Union is possible, which we must be ready to prevent with our offensive actions." German soldiers, 7 hours before the invasion of Russia, their commanders said: "Comrades! The Soviet Union intends to attack our Fatherland on July 18. Thanks to the Fuhrer and his wise far-sighted policy, we will not wait for an attack, but we ourselves will go on the offensive. In fact, the date of July 18 was an invention of Goebbels' propagandists. On the preparation of the Soviet

Hitler did not know the attack, just as Stalin had no idea about the Barbarossa

plan. Hitler, as is well known, signed the directive on the implementation of the Barbarossa plan on December 18, 1940, shortly after Molotov's November visit to Berlin ended in failure. There he was invited to join the Tripartite Pact of Germany and Italy, receiving as a sphere of influence Iran and India ("territories lying south of the borders of the USSR in the direction of the Indian Ocean"). Already after the return of Molotov to Moscow, a reply was sent through the German embassy. The Soviet Union set as its condition for joining the Tripartite Pact the recognition of its spheres of influence in Finland, Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey. Hitler's response was Operation Barbarossa. We will probably never know if Hitler's offer to Stalin to join

the Tripartite Pact was a serious offer or if this offer was just a "cover action". If the first assumption is correct, then Hitler could have refused to attack the USSR in 1941 if Stalin had joined the Triple Alliance on German terms. In the event that the second version is correct, the attack on the USSR in 1941 would have occurred regardless of what conditions Stalin would have agreed to. In the same way, it is impossible to reliably establish whether Stalin was seriously ready to join the alliance of Italy, Japan and Germany if Hitler fulfilled its conditions, or his agreement to join the Tripartite Pact on certain conditions, or whether it was only a "cover action" planned for 1941 the year of the Soviet attack on Germany.

The documents did not preserve the estimated dates for the start of the offensive of the Red Army. Here we are dealing with an unfulfilled event, while the German attack is a fait accompli. But even if a miracle happened and Stalin managed to launch the attack, as planned earlier, on June 12, 10 days before the German attack, this would not change either the course or the outcome of the clash with Hitler. The significantly lower level of training of the Red Army would still lead to its defeat and the rapid transfer of battles to Soviet territory. War and then would be perceived by our people as Patriotic.

Stalin firmly knew that the Red Army was superior to the Wehrmacht in terms of personnel, that the Soviet troops had much more tanks and aircraft than the enemy, and they were not inferior in quality to the German ones. The "Kremlin highlander", who had never served in the army (except for a short stay in the reserve regiment on the eve of the revolution), believed that in combat training the Red Army men and their commanders would not yield to German soldiers and officers. And this was the fatal error. Admiral N. G. Kuznetsov wrote in the first edition of his memoirs "On the Eve", published in 1966: "I. V. Stalin imagined the combat readiness of our Armed Forces to be higher than it actually was. Knowing exactly the number of the newest aircraft stationed on his orders at the border airfields, he believed that at any moment, on a combat alarm signal, they could take off into the air and give a reliable rebuff to the enemy. And he was simply stunned by the news that our planes did not have time to take off, but died right at the airfields. These words did not appear in later editions. Probably, the censors realized that smart readers might come to seditious conclusions: since Stalin exaggerated the combat readiness of the Red Army, he could well have thought about an attack on Germany.

The myth that at the beginning of the Great Patriotic War, the Wehrmacht had a numerical advantage over the Red Army

Since the beginning of the Great Patriotic War, the myth has dominated Soviet historiography, according to which the successes of the Germans in 1941 were due to the surprise attack and the significant numerical superiority that the Wehrmacht had over the Red Army, especially in terms of the number of tanks and aircraft. At the same time, it is argued that the German invasion army, together with the allies, numbered 5.5 million people, while the units of the Red Army opposing them, together with the border guards, totaled only 2.9 million

Human.

The German ground army that invaded the USSR numbered about 3.3 million people. Of these, in the divisions of the first echelon, which crossed the border directly on June 22, there were 2.5 million people. They were supported by 3,680 tanks and assault guns and about 2,000 combat aircraft. If the Red Army had attacked Germany first and had been successful, or if, on the contrary, the German invasion had been repelled by the Red Army in the very first days, the potential German allies Finland, Romania, Hungary, Slovakia and Italy would hardly have gone to war with the USSR. Together with the Germans on June 22, Romanian troops invaded, numbering 342

thousand people. The Romanian Air Force had 124 combat aircraft. On June 25, Finland declared war on the USSR. This happened after 480 Soviet aircraft subjected Finnish airfields to a massive bombardment, one of which housed German aircraft, as well as Helsinki and other Finnish cities. Soviet aviation lost 71 aircraft, damaging one Finnish one. But the bombing was only a pretext, since there were German troops on the territory of Finland and its entry into the war was a foregone conclusion. July 10 Finnish army,

numbering after mobilization about 220 thousand people, began active hostilities. The Finnish Air Force consisted of 295 aircraft, of which 213 were combat aircraft. In July, Hungarian and Italian corps appeared on the Soviet-German front, numbering 40,000 and 62,000, respectively. Hungarian aviation on the Soviet-German front consisted of 42 combat aircraft, the Italian corps was supported by 83 combat aircraft. Romanian, Hungarian and Italian troops had only a few dozen light tanks. One Slovak brigade (5 thousand people, 30 tanks) and 67 Slovak combat

aircraft.

The troops of the Red Army opposing them numbered 4.1 million people. Its numbers reached this figure due to the fact that in April 1941, about 400 thousand people who had previously been exempted from conscription were additionally called up, and in May-June another 800 thousand reservists called up for training were replenished. True, many of the 800 thousand spares had not yet arrived in their units and did not represent a combat-ready force. In the Soviet western border districts, there were 12.8 thousand tanks, including 1,475 of the latest T-34 and KV, and 10,743 combat aircraft, including 1,317 new types of vehicles (MiG-1, MiG-3, Yak-1, LaGG-3, Pe-2, Yak-2, Yak-4, Il-2). The number of Soviet and enemy troops, even taking into account the German allies, was approximately equal. In terms of the number of aircraft and in terms of the number and quality of tanks, the Soviet side had a multiple advantage. But the German troops owned the initiative and created a significant superiority in men and artillery in the directions of the main attacks. The Luftwaffe, on the very first day, won air superiority, which largely neutralized the Soviet superiority in tanks.

It also played a role that by February 1941 all German tanks were equipped with either radios or radios. So, in a light tank company, radio stations were installed on three Pz.II and five Pz.HI, and receivers - on two Pz.II and twelve Pz.HI. In a company of medium tanks, the transceivers had five Pz.IVs and three Pz.IIs, and the receivers had two Pz.IIs and nine Pz.IVs. In the Red Army, by June 22, in the western districts there were 1993 single-turret linear T-26s, 1528 single-turret radial T-26s, 1499 linear BT-7 tanks, and 1212 radial BT-7s. Line tanks did not have any radio stations,

no receivers and had to be guided by the maneuvers of the commanders and the signals given by the flags. On June 1, the Red Army also had 671 T-34 line tanks and 221 radio tanks. With this in mind, the share of line tanks in the border districts exceeded 58%, which made Soviet tank formations poorly controlled. The

German Army Group "South" advanced on Kyiv, the Army Group "Center" - on Moscow, the Army Group "North" - on Leningrad, and the separate army "Norway" - on Murmansk. Hitler expected to crush the Soviet resistance in 3-4 months, that is, before the onset of the autumn thaw in the second half of October and the winter frosts, for which the Wehrmacht was not prepared. During this period, German troops were to reach the Arkhangelsk-Astrakhan line, from where the Luftwaffe was to paralyze the industry of the Urals with constant bombardments. Here, as stated in Hitler's directive, "a barrier against Asiatic Russia" was to be created. But even by the end of December, the Germans were still very far from the AA line, and even from this line, if the Luftwaffe did not have strategic bombers, it would be impossible to paralyze the Ural factories and force Stalin to refuse to continue the fight. The Red

Army was taken by surprise. The suddenness of the German command was achieved thanks to a widespread disinformation campaign designed to convince Stalin that the Wehrmacht was going to land in England in the summer of 1941. The transfer of troops to the East was presented as a defensive measure against possible aggression from the Red Army or as disinformation designed to reassure the British. In addition, almost all tank and motorized divisions, as well as the main aviation forces, were transferred to the East in the last 10 days before the invasion. On June 13, in the officialdom of the Nazi party "Völkische Beobachter", an article by the Minister of Propaganda Joseph Goebbels "Crete as an example" was published, where there was a direct allusion to the imminent landing of the Germans in England. The issue was confiscated by the censors, but in such a way that part of the circulation had time to reach foreign embassies. The answer was the TASS Statement, which

that Germany, like the USSR, scrupulously observes the non-aggression pact. Stalin hoped that Hitler would make a routine response that Germany, they say, also complies with the non-aggression pact. However, Hitler chose not to react at all to the TASS Statement, so as not to discourage his own troops. It also played into his hands that the date of the attack, originally scheduled for May 15, was postponed to June 22 due to the anti-German coup in Yugoslavia and the Wehrmacht campaign in the Balkans. Therefore, those reports of Soviet intelligence, where May 15 was called as a possible date for the German attack, Stalin considered disinformation.

On the first day of the war, 1,200 Soviet aircraft were destroyed, and in the first month, about 10,000 aircraft. Instead of quickly withdrawing the main forces of the western border districts to the lines of fortifications on the old border, behind the rearguards, the Soviet mechanized corps launched counterattacks on the second day of the war on the orders of People's Commissar of Defense Marshal Semyon Timoshenko and Chief of the General Staff General Georgy Zhukov. Stalin hoped to defeat the invading army and on its shoulders to invade Germany and Poland. The main blow, as envisaged by the unrealized plan of attack on Germany, was inflicted by the Southwestern Front. He had 5.5 times more tanks than the enemy, and there were as many T-34s and KVs alone as all the tanks of the German Army Group South. A counter tank battle unfolded in the area of the cities of Lutsk, Rivne and Dubno. The dominance of the Luftwaffe in the air and the low level of training of Soviet tanks and tankers led to the fact that the mechanized corps of the Southwestern Front were defeated and retreated, losing more than half of their armored vehicles. The commander of one of the corps, General Dmitry Ryabyshev, recalled: "... The corps, making tense "super-forced" marches without observing the elementary statutory requirements for servicing the material part and resting personnel, was brought to the battlefield, having up to 500 km of run ... 40-50% materiel were left on the routes of movement of divisions. The remaining materiel after such high-speed marches turned out to be technically unprepared for combat. The situation of the Red Army in this direction was further complicated by the fact that the inhabitants of Lvov rebelled. rebels

entered into battle with the Soviet rear units and released prisoners from prison, whom the NKVD was supposed to shoot during the retreat. Also, units of the "forest brothers" in Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia were actively operating against the Soviet troops. The

Soviet command expected that the main grouping of German troops was concentrated in the southwestern direction and it was here that they were going to launch a "preemptive" strike. In fact, the main blow to the Barbarossa plan was delivered by Army Group Center in Belarus, so the Western Front, which was defending here, found itself in a catastrophic situation in the very first days of the war. His main forces were surrounded at Bialystok and Minsk. More than 300 thousand Red Army soldiers were taken prisoner. Stalin, Timoshenko and Zhukov and the chief of Glavpur, Lev Mekhlis, decided to shift all responsibility for the catastrophe to the front command. The commander of the Western Front, Dmitry Pavlov, was sentenced to death on July 22, along with several subordinates. At the trial, Pavlov stated: "We ... are sitting in the dock not because we committed crimes during the period of hostilities, but because we did not prepare enough for this war in peacetime." He explained why the Soviet aviation was covered with bombs on the airfields on the very first day: "I made a criminal mistake that the aviation was placed on field airfields closer to the border, on airfields intended to be occupied in case of our offensive, but not defense at all." The poor general did not specify that it was not he, but the People's Commissar of Defense and the General Staff, who determined exactly where to deploy the aircraft.

On July 3, 1941, for the first time since the beginning of the war, Stalin addressed the people: "The goal of this all-people Patriotic war against the fascist oppressors is not only to eliminate the danger hanging over our country, but also to help all the peoples of Europe, groaning under the yoke of German fascism," he stressed and added: It is necessary that the Soviet people ... cease to be carefree, so that they mobilize themselves and reorganize all their work on a new, military basis, which knows no mercy to the enemy ... The enemy is cruel and implacable. He sets as his goal the seizure of our lands, watered with our sweat, the seizure of our bread and our oil, extracted by our labor. He sets as his goal the restoration of the power of the landowners, the restoration of tsarism, the destruction of the national

culture and national statehood of Russians, Ukrainians, Belarusians, Lithuanians, Latvians, Estonians, Uzbeks, Tatars, Moldavians, Georgians, Armenians, Azerbaijanis and other free peoples of the Soviet Union, their Germanization, their transformation into slaves of German princes and barons. The matter is, therefore, about the life and death of the Soviet state, about the life and death of the peoples of the USSR. Stalin, instead of the former internationalist slogans, brought Russian national slogans to the fore. Instead of "Proletarians of all countries, unite!" appeared "For the Motherland! For Stalin!". The heroic pages of Russian history were rehabilitated, many Russian commanders, including princes and tsars, were remembered with a kind word. As the poet Nikolai Glazkov wrote, "Lord, stand up for the Soviets, Protect the country from higher races, Because Hitler breaks all Your covenants more often than us."

But the retreat continued. By mid-July, the Germans occupied Belarus, Western Ukraine, Lithuania and Latvia, the Romanians returned Bessarabia and went to Odessa, and the Finns advanced in Karelia. It was not possible to take Kyiv on the move, capture Estonia and break through to

Leningrad. During this time, the Wehrmacht and its allies captured territory approximately equal in area to that which they had already occupied during the hostilities in Poland and France. Killed, wounded and captured during this period, the Red Army lost even significantly more soldiers than, for example, the Polish army during the month-long campaign of the Wehrmacht in Poland. However, there was no evidence of the imminence of the surrender of the Red Army. The huge size of the Soviet territory, the large population and, last but not least, the resilience of the totalitarian system, which, due to the lack of organized internal opposition, could not be destroyed even by the most severe military defeats, had an effect.

The myth of the T-34 tank as the best tank of World War II

The myth of the Soviet T-34 tank boils down to the assertion that it was the best tank of World War II in the sense that it outclassed any German tank in combat. Indeed, the Soviet T-34 tank was

praised not only by the tankers of the Red Army, but also by their opponents, who experienced the full power of his fire. Thus, the German General Friedrich von Mellenthin called the T-34 "the most remarkable example of an offensive weapon of the Second World War." And one of the heads of the armaments service of the German army, General Erich Schneider, claims: "The T-34 showed our tankers, accustomed to victories, superiority in armament, armor and maneuverability and became a real sensation. This 26-ton Russian tank was armed with a 76.2 mm cannon (caliber 41.5), the shells of which pierced the armor of German tanks from 1.5–2 thousand meters, while German tanks could hit Russians from a distance of no more than 500 meters, and even then only if the shells hit the side and rear of the T-34. The thickness of the frontal armor of German tanks was 40 millimeters, the side armor was 14 millimeters. The Russian T-34 tank carried frontal armor 70 mm thick and side armor 45 mm thick, and the effectiveness of direct hits on it was also reduced due to

strong slope.

The chief designer of the T-34 was Mikhail Koshkin, head of the design bureau of the Kharkov Comintern Steam Locomotive Plant. He was assisted by a specialist in tank transmissions, Alexander Morozov, and a former steam locomotive designer, Nikolai Kucherenko. For its time, the tank was advanced and surpassed in its tactical and technical all the tanks then available in the world.

This superiority persisted until the end of 1942, when modernized German T-IV tanks appeared with increased armor thickness and a long-barreled 75 mm gun. They could

fight with the "thirty-four" on an equal footing and even had some advantage due to the more advanced optics of the sights.

After the Battle of Kursk, when the Germans for the first time massively used "tigers" and "panthers" with 88-mm guns, a more powerful gun - 85-mm D-5T was installed on the "thirty-four" and increased the thickness of the armor. In March 1944, a modification of the T-34-85 appeared at the front. Their production ceased in 1946. In total, more than 61 thousand T-34 tanks of various modifications were produced.

It was quite mythological and not true that the T-34 could defeat any German tank in battle. No, the "tiger" that appeared in mass numbers in 1943 pierced the frontal armor of the "thirty-four" from a distance of 1500 meters, and in order to hit the "tiger" our tank had to get close to it by 500 meters. Approximately the same situation was with the "panther". And the "royal tiger" won the duel even with the most powerful Soviet heavy tank IS-2, hitting it with its 88-mm long-barreled gun at a distance at which it could not penetrate the armor of an enemy tank even with its 122-mm gun. However, the main advantage of the "thirty-four" was not at all the ability to defeat any German tank in battle, but the simplicity of design and low

cost of production. None of the participating countries was able to produce a similar tank, which, with such outstanding combat qualities, would cost so cheaply and could be produced in such large quantities. We can say that the Germans largely lost the Second World War due to their advanced scientific and technical thought. So, during the Battle of Kursk in the summer of 1943, the Germans

for the first time on the Eastern Front massively used new types of weapons and military equipment: the Tiger and Panther tanks, the Ferdinand assault guns, and the FV-190 and Xe-129 aircraft. And they seem to have achieved good results in this and in subsequent battles in terms of the number of destroyed enemy armored vehicles. So, according to German statistics, all units equipped with T-VI and T-Y1B tanks ("Tiger" and "Royal Tiger") throughout the war and on all fronts irretrievably lost 1715 vehicles, destroying 9850 enemy tanks and self-propelled guns, i.e. The ratio of losses in armored vehicles turns out to be

close to 1:6. But at least on the Eastern Front, the upgraded T-IYs with the long-barreled 75mm gun had no worse results. Meanwhile, T-IY, even upgraded, cost many times less than the same "tiger" or "panther". Instead of one "tiger" it was possible to produce a dozen T IY and thereby achieve a more favorable quantitative ratio in terms of armored vehicles both with the Red Army and with the armies of the Western allies. Moreover, in the West, tanks that would have surpassed the modernized T-IY did not appear until the end of the war. The American Sherman could only fight him on an equal footing, yielding to both the Panthers and the Tigers. In the Soviet Union, the modernized T-34 with an 85 mm gun first came to the front in March 1944. It was superior to the upgraded T-IY and could fight on equal terms with the Panthers, but was inferior to the Tigers and Royal Tigers. However, it can be reasonably assumed that if the Germans had not had "tigers" and "panthers", Soviet designers would not have received an assignment to develop the T-34-85 until the end of the war.

Therefore, it would not be an exaggeration to say that the Germans lost the Second World War, including because they were the only participants who already during the war intensively introduced fundamentally new types of weapons and military equipment into mass production, be it "tigers" and "panthers". "or the latest Focke-Wulfs and Me-262 jet fighters and V-missiles. All these novelties were many times more expensive than their earlier counterparts (for the V-missiles, heavy bombers were such an analogue), but by no means as many times more effective. Instead of wasting energy and money on the latest "toys", perhaps it was worth increasing the production of old models, only modernizing them? For example, the same Me-109 and T-IY? Then, perhaps, it would be possible, if not to eliminate, then to significantly reduce the numerical superiority of the Allies in armaments and military equipment. But under the conditions of a totalitarian regime, the main task was to develop and produce the necessary weapons and military equipment, and the question of its price faded into the background. Designers got the opportunity to implement their most daring designs. And this happened even before the superiority

Allies on all fronts forced Hitler to seek salvation in search of a "wonder weapon" that could radically change the course of the war that was unfavorably developing for Germany.

In fairness, it must be said that in terms of irretrievable losses, the "tigers" had some advantage over the upgraded T-IYs. For the same number of destroyed Soviet tanks, the irretrievable losses of the "tigers" directly in battle were about half as much as the irretrievable losses of even the modernized T-IY tanks. Thus, the use of "tigers" also reduced the irretrievable losses among the German tank crews. In the context of a shortage of human resources in Germany, this was an important circumstance. However, it still didn't make the Tigers any more effective than the T-IYs with long guns, given the relative cost of both. Likewise, compared to the T-34, the "tigers" were ineffective, taking into account their cost. Of course, if the T-34s were equipped with more advanced German optics and had more comfort for the crew, like German tanks, they would have acted even more efficiently. However, from the point of view of the ratio of combat effectiveness to cost, the T-34 tank was the best tank of the Second World War.

The myth of the feat of Nikolai Gastello

The myth of the feat of Nikolai Gastello, who allegedly rammed a column of German equipment with his wrecked bomber, became one of the first myths of the Great Patriotic War. Nikolai

Frantsevich Gastello, who became one of the first Heroes of the Soviet Union after the start of the war, was quite a suitable figure for canonization. Although the captain commander of the 4th squadron of the 207th long-range bomber regiment was born in 1907 in Moscow, he is a Belarusian by nationality, which should have emphasized the internationalism of the Red Army. In addition, it turned out that he shed blood for his native land. He participated in the battles at Khalkhin Gol and in the Soviet-Finnish war, and also participated in the campaign in Bessarabia and

Northern Bukovina. According to the canonical Soviet version, on June 26, 1941, the DB-ZF (IL-4) bomber, being hit, rammed a non-German motorized column. However, according to a combat report, the plane fell 40 meters from the anti-aircraft battery that shot it down, and there is no evidence that it caused any damage to it at all. In addition, given the weight and aerodynamic qualities of the DB-3, this bomber, even if one engine failed, practically lost control. Therefore, there was no way to direct it to any target. Most importantly, the surname of Nikolai Gastello, as the surname of the pilot who commanded the crew of the bomber that crashed near the Radoshkovichi-Molodechno highway, in the Radoshkovichi district of the Vileika (now Minsk) region of Belarus, arose by mistake. It was named by the commander of the only Soviet bomber that survived that battle, Fyodor Vorobyov, who claimed in a report that Gastello's plane fell on a German convoy, while another crew plane under the command of Alexander Maslov crashed into the forest. Many years later, in 1951, during the reburial of Gastello and his crew, on the corpses found near the village of Dekshnyany, about 170 meters from the highway, personal belongings of Gastello's colleagues, the commander of the 1st squadron of the 207th DBAP, Captain Alexander Spiridonovich, were found

Maslov, as well as his gunner-radio operator Grigory Vasilyevich Reutov. It became clear that it was Maslov's plane that crashed near the road. And Gastello's plane crashed in the forest, into the swamp. According to the stories of local residents, one pilot escaped from this last plane with a parachute and, wounded, was taken prisoner by the Germans. According to some indications, it was Gastello, since the jump, according to witnesses, was made from the wing of the aircraft. And only the crew commander could jump from there. This fact was noted in the "List of irretrievable losses of the commanding and enlisted personnel of the 42nd Air Division from June 22 to June 28, 1941." Against the crew of Gastello, it says: "One person from this crew jumped with a parachute from a burning plane, who is unknown." So theoretically it cannot be ruled out that Gastello survived the Second World War. There is information that a certain Nikolai Gastello died in London in the 1990s. But whether it was Nikolai Frantsevich himself, or his descendant, or just a namesake, it is not yet possible to establish. It should also be noted that the downed DB-3 immediately lost control, so Gastello could no longer help his comrades. And it was practically impossible to send a downed aircraft to a cluster of enemy equipment.

Since the data that another crew actually died instead of Gastello contradicted the official version, in 1951 Maslov's crew was reburied without publicity in a mass grave at the Radoshkovichi cemetery, and fragments of Maslov's bomber were sent to the country's museums, like the remains of Gastello's plane, on the site of the death of Maslov's crew, a monument dedicated to the feat of Gastello's crew was erected. The very fact of the discovery of the wreckage of the Maslov bomber and the remains of his crew proves that the plane did not crash into a convoy of vehicles with fuel and ammunition or into an anti-aircraft battery, but fell onto soft ground. Moreover, the Germans usually used in the field not anti-aircraft batteries, but self-propelled anti-aircraft guns. And 170 meters from the highway, neither an anti-aircraft battery nor a self-propelled gun can be located

could.

In 1958, Gastello crew members Lieutenants Anatoly Akimovich Burdenyuk and Grigory Nikolaevich Skorobogaty and Senior Sergeant Alexei Alexandrovich Kalinin were posthumously awarded the Order of the Patriotic War, 1st class. By the way,

I must say that Gastello's crew was international: Burdenyuk - Ukrainian, Skorobogaty - Russian, Kalinin - Nenets.

Later, in the Matskovsky swamp between the villages of Matski and Shepel, the remains of Gastello's aircraft were found, since a tag from the M-87B engine, serial number 87844, belonging to his aircraft, was found, as well as a letter from G. N. Skorobogaty. And Captain Alexander Maslov and three other members of his crew were posthumously awarded the title of Heroes of Russia in 1996. In fact, both Maslov and Gastello, and the members of their crews, were true heroes. After all, DB-3s were designed for bombing from a great height. In the first days of the war, due to a shortage of attack aircraft and dive bombers, long-range bombers were forced to use them for bombing from low altitudes, where they became easy prey for anti-aircraft guns and fighters. Therefore, each sortie on a slow-moving DB-3, devoid of fighter cover, was a real feat, and almost certain death or captivity awaited the brave pilots. Of the 27 bombers that flew out to bomb the enemy in the summer of 1941 in the Radoshkovichi region, only one returned.

And Captain Maslov and members of his crew, Lieutenant Vladimir Mikhailovich Balashov, Senior Sergeant Grigory Vasilyevich Reutov and Junior Sergeant Bakhturas Beiksbayev were posthumously awarded the title of Hero of Russia in 1996. Kazakh Beiksbayev was also awarded the title of People's Hero of Kazakhstan in 1998.

Alexander Maslov, like Gastello, was born in 1907, but not in Moscow, but in the village of Andreevsky, Kolomna district, Moscow province. He participated in the campaign against Poland in September 1939 and in the Soviet-

Finnish war. Obviously, in the case of Gastello, we are dealing with pure myth. Everything here is unreliable - both the hero's randomly named surname (in battle it was very difficult to keep track of whose plane fell where), and giving the hero a conscious desire for self-sacrifice (which in reality, purely technically, could not be), and inflicting huge losses on the enemy (which in reality did not have). The Gastello legend was intended to inspire the Red Army to self-sacrifice and cover up the failures of Soviet aviation in the first weeks of the war.

The myth of the battle of Smolensk

The main myth of the battle of Smolensk is the assertion that this battle played an important role in disrupting the German blitzkrieg and that the Soviet troops were successful in the final stage. To prove this, Soviet historians artificially included in the Battle of Smolensk the Yelnin offensive operation of the Reserve Front, which took place in August-September 1941 and ended with the liquidation of the Yelnin ledge. However, by that time, the German command considered the battle of Smolensk over and abandoned the main forces of Army Group Center to encircle the troops of the Southwestern Front in the Kyiv region and for an operation against Leningrad. Without waiting for the complete elimination of the groupings

of Soviet troops surrounded in the areas of Bialystok and Minsk, the command of Army Group Center decided to continue the offensive against Moscow with the forces of tank and motorized divisions, preempting the completion of the concentration of troops of the second strategic echelon of the Red Army. On July 10, the main forces of Herman Goth's 3rd Panzer Group rushed around Smolensk from the north. Heinz Guderian's 2nd Panzer Group was advancing on the city from the south. Goth's troops defeated Konev's 19th army and by July 11 completely captured Vitebsk. Attempts by units of the three Soviet armies to return Vitebsk ended in failure.

On July 16, 1941, Guderian's tanks broke into Smolensk. On the same day, the 7th Panzer Division of the Gotha Panzer Group took Yartsevo after many days of attacks. Just over 300 km left to Moscow. It seemed that soon the Red Army would be destroyed. But the approaching Soviet reserves launched a counterattack, and fierce battles went on in the Smolensk region for two weeks. The German tankers failed to capture the city on the move. Smolensk was defended by the 16th Army of General Lukin, urgently redirected from the Southwestern Front. Units of the 19th and 20th armies were also surrounded in the Smolensk region. General Andrey Eremenko, who was appointed commander of the Western Front on

side - Field Marshal Hans Kluge, commander of the 4th Army, which included both tank groups. Eremenko's predecessor as front commander, Marshal Semyon Timoshenko, in an order dated July 17, warned: "The State Defense Committee noted with its special order that the command staff of the units of the Western Front is imbued with evacuation moods and easily relates to the issue of the withdrawal of troops from Smolensk and the surrender of Smolensk to the enemy. If these sentiments are true, then the State Defense Committee considers such sentiments among the command staff a crime bordering on outright treason. The Defense Committee ordered to stop with an iron hand such sentiments, discrediting the banner of the Red Army. Under no circumstances should the city of Smolensk be handed over to the enemy.

Soviet troops blew up bridges across the Dnieper, but, despite stubborn resistance, the Germans managed to capture most of Smolensk by July 19. On July 18-20, a group of General Konstantin Rokossovsky delivered a counterattack to release Smolensk from the Yartsevo region, but could not break through to the encircled. Equally unsuccessful were the actions of other operational groups of the Western Front under the command of Generals Vladimir Kachalov, Ivan Maslennikov and Vasily Khomenko. Five divisions from Kachalov's operational group near Roslavl were surrounded and almost completely destroyed, and Kachalov himself died. In the order of the Headquarters of the Supreme High Command No. 270 of August 16, 1941, he was groundlessly accused of treason and voluntary surrender. Vladimir Yakovlevich was rehabilitated only in 1963. Mogilev fell on July 26. And on

the night of July 27, the Germans captured the Solovyovskaya crossing, closing the encirclement. Eremenko failed to coordinate the actions of all operational groups. The offensive was poorly prepared, since the divisions of the third strategic echelon urgently transferred to Smolensk were introduced into battle on the move.

By July 28, the command of the Army Group "Center" transferred infantry divisions to Smolensk, released after the liquidation of the Minsk "cauldron", and the position of the city's defenders became

hopeless. On August 4–5, the remnants of the encircled grouping left the encirclement, largely due to the fact that Rokossovsky's units temporarily recaptured the Solovyovskaya crossing.

On July 30, the Supreme High Command of the Wehrmacht (OKW), by its Directive No. 34, ordered Army Group Center with the main forces to go on the defensive. Without the transfer of additional forces, she could not continue the offensive against Moscow. Hitler decided to reach strategic targets on the flanks first. Army Group "South" was supposed to capture Kiev, and then break into the Donbass. Army Group "North" was to reach the approaches to Leningrad, but not to take the city. Thus, the flank threats to Army Group Center would be eliminated, and then it was supposed to resume the offensive against the Soviet capital. This was objected to by the High Command of the Ground Forces (OKH), which insisted on continuing the offensive against Moscow, and by many army commanders. So, the commander of the 3rd Panzer Group Guderian recalled: "It was a complete renunciation of the original plan - with powerful forces concentrated in the center, break through Smolensk to Moscow. The "powerful forces" of the center, consisting of two tank groups and three field armies, were reduced to one field army. Both tank groups - the main striking force - were transferred one to the right, the other to the left. It is quite obvious that such a circumstance was contrary to the principle - to attack where the enemy is most weakened, that is, between Smolensk and Velikie Luki in the direction of Rzhev. Subsequently, many German generals called the turn to the north and south, carried out in August - September, one of the main reasons for the collapse of the blitzkrieg. Meanwhile, even if Hitler had given Army Group Center the necessary reinforcements at the expense of other army groups, the advance on Moscow would still have slowed down due to the need to send additional forces to repel flank threats from the north and south, from the Soviet North-West and Southwestern fronts, and still the Germans would not have had time to reach their goal before winter.

Tactically, the battle of Smolensk was won by the Wehrmacht. From July 10 to August 4, in the battles for Polotsk, Vitebsk, Smolensk and Mogilev, about 300,000 Soviet soldiers were taken prisoner, more than 3 thousand tanks were knocked out and captured. Approximately the same number of Soviet

the soldier had previously been captured in Belarus. However, at the cost of heavy losses, the Soviet command was able to significantly slow down the advance of the enemy in the Moscow direction. However, the blitzkrieg had not yet been thwarted, and the capture of Kyiv and Donbass, as well as the blockade of Leningrad, were carried out by the Germans as part of the implementation of the

"blitzkrieg" strategy. Stalin regarded the Battle of Smolensk as a major defeat for the Red Army. On July 29, Zhukov was removed from his post as chief of the General Staff and appointed commander of the Reserve Front. This was preceded by dramatic events. On July 1, 1953, Lavrenty Beria, who was arrested and feared that he would soon be killed, wrote to his former comrades in the Presidium of the Central Committee: "T. T. Malenkov and Molotov should know well that Zhukov, when he was removed from the General Staff at the instigation of Mehlis, because his position was very dangerous, together with you we persuaded him to appoint him as front commander and thereby saved the future hero of our Patriotic War ... "Stalin wanted to make a scapegoat out of Zhukov for the defeat in the battle of Smolensk, and only the intercession of other members of the GKO defused the situation.

Zhukov was appointed commander of the Reserve Front and led a successful opera

The myth of the siege of Leningrad

The main myth associated with the blockade of Leningrad is the assertion that in the fall of 1941, immediately after the troops of Army Group North closed the blockade ring around the city, Hitler intended to take Leningrad by storm, and only the skillful actions of the new commander of the Leningrad Front, General G. K. Zhukov prevented the capture of the city by the Germans. In fact, Hitler was going to storm Leningrad only a year later, in the autumn of 1942, for which he transferred heavy siege artillery from near Sevastopol, along with the headquarters of the 11th Army operating there, led by Field Marshal Erich von Manstein, near Leningrad. In the autumn of 1941, the Germans were not going to storm Leningrad. And it was not the lack of siege artillery that was the main reason here, but Hitler's desire to concentrate all his forces in the Moscow direction in order to try to defeat the Soviet troops here and capture Moscow even before the autumn thaw. A private myth is the assertion that the authorities did not take care of concentrating sufficient food supplies in Leningrad so that the population of the city could withstand a long siege. In fact, what the city and allied authorities really did not take

care of was to evacuate as many residents as possible from Leningrad before it was under blockade. This can be explained by the fact that in the first weeks of the war, almost no one in the USSR imagined that the Germans would reach Leningrad.

Until August 27, when Leningrad's railway communication with the rest of the country was cut off, 164 thousand workers and employees were taken out of the city along with 86 defense enterprises and 220 thousand children. However, 175 thousand children were taken to the regions of the Leningrad region, and when this territory was occupied by the Germans, they had to be returned to Leningrad.

On September 8, the troops of the 18th German Army took Shlisselburg and reached the southern shore of Lake Ladoga, and even earlier they cut the Leningrad-Moscow railway. The "Northern Capital" was under blockade for 871 days.

At the time of the blockade, there were 2 million 544 thousand people in the city, including about 400 thousand children. Another 343 thousand people lived in the suburbs, which were also under blockade ring.

As a result of the bombardment on September 8, the largest Badaevsky food warehouses in Leningrad caught fire. Contrary to popular belief, they were by no means completely burned out, and this fire could not in any way be the cause of the subsequent famine. In fact, only a three-day supply of sugar and about a day and a half of flour were burned at the Badaevsky warehouses. All the stocks in these warehouses would be enough for the city for a maximum of two days. After all, almost a three millionth city in peacetime was supplied with food, as they say, "from the wheels." Every day, the necessary food was delivered to it from other regions of the country. It was basically impossible to create strategic food supplies for Leningrad. For example, in the first days of the blockade, with very meager norms, 2,100 tons of flour were consumed daily in the city. A semi-annual supply of flour would have amounted to more than 360 thousand tons. The city did not even have warehouses for storing such gigantic food supplies. Hunger was inevitable. The "Road of Life" across Lake Ladoga, which became the only way to communicate with the mainland, could only cover the needs of the troops in ammunition, food

and medicine, and was only minimally able to satisfy the needs of the civilian population. As early as September 6, 1941, Hitler ordered that by September 15, the 3rd Gepner Panzer Group and one of the air corps of the 1st Air Fleet should be transferred from Army Group North to Army Group Center to prepare an attack on

Moscow. Without these forces, a successful storming of Leningrad was impossible, and Hitler generally wanted to avoid storming the city, fearing heavy losses. On September 18, Halder reported to the headquarters of Army Group North that he and Brauchitsch considered it expedient to take possession of the city as a result of starvation, and not through the use of weapons. Von Leeb held up Geppner's panzer divisions for several days, hoping to break into the city. When this failed, he continued to attack in order to pin the troops of the Leningrad Front to the defense.

suburbs and prevent them from breaking through the blockade ring. On September 22, von Leeb wrote in his diary: "There should be no attack on Petersburg and its capture. It only needs to be surrounded and destroyed by artillery fire and air attacks. All preparatory measures for the purpose of occupying the city and using it in one's own interests must be stopped. On September 13, Zhukov

replaced Voroshilov at the head of the Leningrad Front. He immediately ordered for the retreat without his written order to shoot all commanders, political workers and Red Army soldiers. On September 15, the Germans withdrew the main formations of the 1st Air Fleet from Leningrad, and on September 18-21, seven divisions of the 4th Panzer Group left from here. Only after that, the Soviet troops were able to stop the German offensive on the Leningrad suburbs, but they failed to break through the blockade ring in the area of the Mga station, where the 54th Army of Marshal Grigory Kulik was advancing towards the troops of the Leningrad Front. On September 28,

Zhukov issued code number 4976: "Explain to all personnel that all the families of those who surrendered to the enemy will be shot and, upon returning from captivity, they will also all be shot." Reporting this order on October 5 to the Secretary of the Central Committee Georgy Malenkov, the head of the Main Political Directorate of the Navy Ivan Rogov noted that it contradicted the order of the Stavka No. 270 of August 16, according to which the families of those who voluntarily surrendered to the enemy were only subject to exile, but not to execution. It can be assumed that after Zhukov's departure from the Leningrad Front, his inhuman order to execute the families of prisoners of war was no longer applied.

Stalin, on the other hand, thought more about saving the troops encircled in Leningrad, rather than the civilian population. On the night of October 23, he gave the following order to the Military Council of the Leningrad Front: "Judging by your slow actions, we can conclude that you have not yet realized the critical situation in which the troops of the Leningrad Front are. If you do not break through the front within the next few days and do not re-establish a strong connection with the 54th Army, which links you with the rear of the country, all your troops will be taken prisoner. The restoration of this connection is necessary not only in order to supply the troops of the Leningrad Front, but especially in order to give an outlet for the troops of the Leningrad Front to retreat to the east to avoid capture, if

Necessity will force the surrender of Leningrad. Keep in mind that Moscow is in a critical situation and it is not able to help you with new forces. Either you will break through the front in these two or three days and give our troops the opportunity to withdraw to the east if it is impossible to hold Leningrad, or you will all be taken prisoner. We demand decisive and swift action from you. Concentrate eight or ten divisions and break through to the east. This is necessary both in case Leningrad is retained, and in case Leningrad is surrendered. For us, the army is more important. We demand decisive action from you. Stalin." If the blockade had been

broken in October or November 1941, there can be no doubt that the troops of the Leningrad Front would have been ordered to leave the besieged "Northern Capital" and break through to the east. In this case, the fate of the population of Leningrad could turn out to be even more tragic than it turned out to be in reality. The Germans would not have been able to feed the Leningraders in the winter of 1941/42, just as they could not feed millions of prisoners of war. For this, the German army had neither the necessary food supplies nor the will of the political leadership in the person of Hitler. From October 1, 1941, workers and

engineers and technicians began to receive 400 grams of bread per day on cards, and dependents - 200 grams each. If the rationing system had been introduced not since the beginning of September, but earlier, at least in July, and if mass evacuation had begun at the same time, this could have saved tens and hundreds of thousands of lives. On November 20, the norm reached an absolute minimum - 250 grams - for workers and engineers, 125 - for dependents. These hunger norms were maintained until December 25, when, thanks to the "Road of Life", they were able to increase them by 100 grams for workers and 75 for dependents. Nevertheless, in January 1942, the death rate peaked. Almost 100 thousand people died. On January 24, there was a new significant increase in standards. Workers began to receive 400 grams of bread, employees - 300, dependents and children - 250. There were cases of corpse-eating and cannibalism in the city. From December 1941 to June 1942 alone, more than 2,100 cannibals and corpse-eaters were shot.

On January 18, 1943, the troops of the Leningrad and Volkhov fronts broke through the blockade. In 18 days, the builders laid the Shlisselburg-Polyana line. On February 7, the first echelon from the mainland arrived in Leningrad. A total of 3,104 trains arrived in the city by the end of 1943.

The siege from Leningrad was completely lifted during the Leningrad-Novgorod operation of the Leningrad and Volkhov fronts on January 14–27,

1944. The number of victims of hunger, bombing and shelling among the civilian population of Leningrad during the blockade is estimated from 650 thousand to 1 million people. The figure of 650 thousand victims of the blockade is an approximate number of burials of 1941-1944 at the two main memorial cemeteries - Piskarevsky and Serafimovsky. This number does not include refugees from the occupied areas, who were many. When the blockade was finally lifted in January 1944, only 560,000 inhabitants remained in Leningrad.

The myth of the Kyiv environment

The main myth associated with the encirclement of the main forces of the Southwestern Front in the Kiev region lies in the assertion of Marshal Zhukov that it could have been prevented if Stalin had listened to him, Zhukov, the advice given back on July 29, and ordered to surrender Kiev and withdraw troops of the Southwestern Front for the Dnieper. As if it was precisely for this advice that Zhukov was removed from his

post as chief of the General Staff. In fact, events unfolded as follows. In mid-July, the troops of the 1st Panzer Group of General Ewald von Kleist and the 6th German Army of Field Marshal Walther von Reichenau were stopped at the borders of the Kiev UR near the Irpen River by parts of the 37th Army of General Andrei Vlasov and counterattacks of the 5th Army of General Mikhail Potapov and the 6th Army of General Ivan

Muzychenko. However, soon, in connection with the breakthrough of the 17th German Army of General Karl von Shtulpnagel to Pervomaisk, the 6th Army and the 12th Army of Grigory Ponedelin were surrounded in the Uman region. By August 13, German troops, not exceeding 100 thousand people, took 103 thousand prisoners,

only 11 thousand people were able to escape. Zhukov's report to Headquarters on the situation in the southwestern direction really existed, but it was made not on July 29, but on August 19. It stated: "I believe that the enemy knows very well our entire defense system, our entire operational-strategic grouping of our forces and knows our nearest capabilities ... To counter the enemy and prevent the destruction of the Central Front and the enemy's access to the rear of the Southwestern Front, I consider it my duty to report considerations about the need to assemble a strong grouping in the region of Glukhov, Chernigov, Konotop as soon as possible. The echelon of cover for the concentration should immediately be thrown onto the Desna River ... "After the Uman" boiler ", it was no longer difficult to predict such a move by the Germans, and there was no direct proposal to leave Kyiv in the report.

But on August 4, Hitler gathered in the Belarusian city of Borisov a meeting of the command of Army Group Center, at which he ordered the 2nd Army and 2nd Panzer Group to turn south, temporarily abandoning the attack on Moscow. By mid-August,

Army Group South reached the Dnieper in the area from Kherson to Kyiv. On August 19, the 2nd Army from the Center group took Gomel. This further strengthened Hitler's intention to defeat the Southwestern Front before attacking Moscow.

On August 16, the commander-in-chief of the southwestern strategic direction, Marshal Semyon Budyonny, proposed withdrawing the troops of the Southwestern Front beyond the Dnieper in order to free up forces to repel the

threat from the north. On August 19, the withdrawal was authorized by the directive of the Headquarters. On the right bank, it was ordered to hold only the Kiev fortified area. On August 20, the German 1st Panzer Army reached the Dnieper near Zaporozhye and captured a pontoon crossing near Dnepropetrovsk. On the same day, the German 17th Army crossed the Dnieper at Kremenchug and created a bridgehead, where units of the 1st Panzer Group were also transferred.

The directive issued on August 21, signed by Hitler, stated: "The most important task before the onset of winter is not to capture Moscow, but to capture the Crimea, industrial and coal areas on the Seversky Donets River and block the Russian oil routes from the Caucasus. In the north, such a task is the encirclement of Leningrad and the connection with the Finnish troops. On August 24, the 2nd

Panzer Group launched an attack on Konotop. The 3rd Panzer Division of General Walter Model managed to capture the 700-meter bridge across the Desna east of Novgorod Seversky unscathed. The 1st Panzer Group was advancing towards Guderian's group from the Kremenchug area. The Bryansk Front of Andrey Eremenko acted against the 2nd Panzer Group. However, leaving a barrier of three divisions against him, Guderian's group by the end of August was able to hold two bridgeheads on the Desna - near Korop and Novgorod Seversky. On September 7, Guderian's tanks entered Konotop. On the same day, Budyonny requested permission to withdraw Mikhail Potapov's 5th Army, but was refused. On September 10, the 2nd Panzer Group broke through to Romny. The German troops also advanced

Kremenchug bridgehead. It became clear that the Southwestern Front was threatened with encirclement. Budyonny and Kirponos offered to surrender Kyiv and, at the expense of the troops of the Kyiv fortified area, try to repel Guderian's offensive. However, Stalin and Shaposhnikov did not allow the retreat. Headquarters still hoped that the troops of the Bryansk Front, if not defeat Guderian, then at least force him to transfer part of the forces from the group that was trying to surround the troops of the Southwestern Front. In addition, Stalin and Shaposhnikov believed that only the infantry divisions of the 17th Army were advancing from the Kremenchug bridgehead, while the Kleist tank group was operating against the Southern Front. In this case, there was still enough time to prevent the encirclement of the main forces of the Southwestern Front. But on September 13, Budyonny, who tried to insist on the immediate surrender of Kyiv, was replaced as commander-in-chief of the South-Western direction by Marshal Timoshenko. Meanwhile, on this day, Model's 3rd Panzer Division from Guderian's group approached Lokhvitsa, and Hube's 16th Panzer Division from Kleist's group approached Lubny. There was still a 40-kilometer corridor between them, through which the troops of the Southwestern Front could retreat to the east. On September 14, 1941, at 03:25, the chief of staff of the front, General Vasily Tupikov, on his own initiative, addressed the chief of the General Staff and the chief of staff of the commander-in-chief of the South-Western direction with a telegram, where he asked for permission for an immediate withdrawal, warning that "the beginning of the catastrophe you understand - matter of a couple of days. In response, Shaposhnikov sent a telegram, demanding to stop the retreat. On September 16,

Timoshenko orally, through the head of the operational department of the headquarters of the Southwestern Front, Ivan Bagramyan, conveyed to Kirponos an order to withdraw the front's troops to the line of the river. Psel. Semyon Konstantinovich insured himself in case Stalin again forbade leaving Kyiv, and then it would be possible to attribute everything to the command of the South-Western Front, which allegedly allowed the withdrawal without authorization. But Kirponos, remembering Stalin's instructions not to surrender Kiev, at 5 o'clock in the morning on September 17 turned to Moscow for confirmation of permission to withdraw, since he no longer had contact with Timoshenko's headquarters in Kharkov. Only on the night of September 18, Shaposhnikov allowed the troops of the 37th Army to lea

front troops. However, even on the evening of September 17, a few minutes before the final loss of communication with the army headquarters, Kirponos managed to transfer the order to the 5th, 21st, 26th and 37th armies to break through to the east. The units of the 38th and 40th armies that were outside the "cauldron" should have supported the exit of the front's troops from the encirclement by striking at Romny and Lubny. But it was already too late. On the evening of September 14, the forward detachments of the 3rd Panzer Division of the 2nd Panzer Group and the 9th Panzer Division of the 1st Panzer Group met near Lokhvitsa. On the same day, the 16th Panzer Division captured Lubny, creating a powerful barrier on the inner front of the encirclement. Kirponos asked for permission to move his command post from Pryluky to Kyiv in order to try to organize all-round defense there, relying on the significant stocks of weapons and ammunition of the Kyiv UR, but the Headquarters forbade him to do this. By September 18, when the encircled began to break through, the Germans managed to concentrate large forces on the likely routes of withdrawal of Soviet troops to the east.

Timoshenko organized a counterattack in the Romny area with the forces of the 2nd Cavalry Corps, the 100th Infantry Division, the 1st and 129th Tank Brigades under the general leadership of General Pavel Belov. On September 16–23, a fierce battle was fought for Romny. Soviet troops entered the battle separately, as they arrived. According to Guderian, the situation was critical, but the Germans managed to keep Romny. However, even if the Soviet troops recaptured this railway junction, it would not have helped the encircled, since not a single group that tried to break out of the encirclement in the direction of Romny retreated. A new, more promising counterattack in the Lokhvitsa area, which could really help the encircled, Timoshenko organized only on September 23, when all the large breaking through groupings of Soviet troops had already been defeated. On September 20, the combined column of the headquarters of the Southwestern Front and the 5th Army was almost completely destroyed near the Dryukovshchina farm,

15 km southwest of Lokhvitsa. Kirponos, a member of the Military Council of the front, Mikhail Burmistenko, the chief of staff of the front, General Vasily Tupikov, and dozens of other generals and senior commanders were killed. The commander of the 5th Army, General Mikhail Potapov, was taken prisoner. Resistance in the "cauldron" continued until 26 September.

In total, 533 thousand soldiers and commanders of the Southwestern Front fell into German captivity from August 31 to September 26. Another 132 thousand people were captured by the 2nd Panzer Group and the 2nd Army in the Gomel region from 14 to 23 August. These figures add up to the final figure of 665 thousand, published in the final report of the OKW at the end of the Kyiv battle. Only 21 thousand people were able to get out of the encirclement.

The reason for the defeat was that Stalin and Shaposhnikov strove to keep Kyiv at all costs and hoped too much for the Bryansk Front, which was supposed to smash Guderian's tank group. The offensive of the Reserve Front on Yelnya actually played into the hands of the Germans, as it diverted significant Soviet forces from the Kyiv direction. At the same time, the German command, having shifted its main efforts to the southwestern direction, was ready, if necessary, to leave the Yelnin ledge.

The myth of the defense of Odessa

The main myth of the defense of Odessa is the assertion that the Romanian troops besieging the city suffered several times more losses than the Soviet garrison defending Odessa, which is why the capture of Odessa turned into a Pyrrhic victory for the

Romanians. Hitler promised the dictator (conductor) of Romania, Ion Antonescu, to give Odessa to the Romanians, along with the territory between the Dniester and the Bug, officially called Transnistria in Bucharest. Only Romanian troops advanced on Odessa, significantly inferior in combat capability to the Wehrmacht. The Odessa naval base posed a serious threat to Romania, as it was located about 300 km from Constanta and the bridge over the Danube at Cernavod and 200 km from Bucharest and the Ploiesti oil region. Antonescu insisted that the capture of Odessa be a purely Romanian operation. The battles for the city began on August 5, 1941. Romanians date the first battles for Odessa on August 8, when the headquarters of the 4th Romanian army issued a directive that ordered to defeat the Soviet troops between the Dniester and the Tiligul estuary and take Odessa on the move. However, the Soviet troops relied on the fortifications covering Odessa, and the Romanians failed to take Odessa on the move. It took a long time to gnaw through three lines of defense with bunkers and anti-tank ditches. On August 13, the Romanian troops east of the Tiligul estuary reached the sea coast and completely blocked Odessa from land. The city was defended by the troops of the Odessa defensive region under the command of Rear Admiral Gavriil Zhukov, consisting of the Separate Primorsky Army, commanded by General Georgy Sofronov, and from the beginning of October - Ivan Petrov. They were supported by a detachment of ships of the Black Sea Fleet. The total number of defenders was more than 130 thousand people.

Thanks to the stubborn defense of the Soviet troops, the Romanian 4th Army of General Nicolae Chuperca, numbering 340.2 thousand people, despite more than a twofold numerical superiority, made its way to the Odessa outskirts for almost a month and a half. Already on August 13, the offensive had to be suspended, as it took

reinforcements. On August 17, the Romanians captured the city's water tanks. However, further advance was halted by Soviet counterattacks. The narrow front of defense (the first line of defense did not exceed 80 km in the perimeter and was located 25-30 km from the city center, and as the retreat to Odessa, the battle formations of the defenders became denser) did not allow the Romanians to use their numerical superiority. Only on September 14, the Romanian troops reached the near approaches to the city and were able to shell the port with guns. With the help of the fresh 157th Infantry Division deployed from Novorossiysk, the OOP command organized a counterattack in the Eastern Sector, dropping an amphibious assault in the Grigorievka area (at the same time, a parachute assault was dropped behind enemy lines) and by September 24, freeing Chebanka and Staraya and Novaya Dofinovka. The Romanian troops retreated 6 km and lost the opportunity to bombard the harbor with heavy guns. However, at the end of September, the 11th German-Romanian army of Manstein broke into the Crimea. It became clear that the 51st separate army of General Fyodor Isidorovich Kuznetsov, who was defending the Crimea, would not hold the enemy. The Germans threatened Sevastopol, so already on September 30, the OOP command received an order to prepare for the evacuation to the Crimea, which began on October 1. On October 16, the last ships left the port. In total, 86,000 soldiers and officers were evacuated to Crimea, including about 6,000 wounded, and 15,000 civilians. Soviet troops covered the retreat with active hostilities. On the night of October 2, 1941, Soviet troops managed to surround part of the forces of the Romanian 4th Army, and only the widespread use of aviation by the Romanians saved the situation. The Romanians did not notice the withdrawal of Soviet troops until the very last moment, and having discovered it on the last day, they made

their way through dense minefields for a long time. The German command was worried that the Romanians could not capture Odessa in any way. Chief of the General Staff Franz Halder wrote in his diary on August 20: "Odessa still continues to cause concern. Only one Romanian border division approached the northwestern outskirts of the city. It is still doubtful whether the Romanian command and its troops have matured to carry out such a task. On the night of October 9, covering the evacuation, Soviet troops counterattacked and took up to 500 prisoners

Romanian infantry regiment. On October 11, the command of Army Group South promised the Romanian command to provide a German infantry division and heavy artillery by October 24 for a new assault on Odessa. However, due to the evacuation of Soviet troops, this issue dropped.

The loss of Soviet troops during the defense of Odessa amounted, according to official figures, to 41,268 people (16,578 killed and missing and 24,690 wounded and sick). These data seem to be significantly underestimated, especially in terms of deadweight losses. According to Romanian data, about 16 thousand Soviet prisoners of war were taken near Odessa. Then it turns out that during the defense of Odessa, the Soviet troops had practically no losses killed, which is absurd. It can be assumed that the irretrievable losses in reality were 2-3 times higher and amounted to no less than 33 thousand people. The Romanian troops lost 92,545 men (17,729 killed, 63,345 wounded and 11,471 missing) as well as 19 tanks and 205 guns and mortars. Most likely, the irretrievable losses of the parties were approximately equal to each other, or even a slight superiority was on the Romanian side, and there were 2.6 times more wounded in the Romanian army. According to Romanian data, 151 Soviet aircraft and 20 Romanian aircraft were destroyed. The Soviet fleet lost 46 transports, of which 12 were sunk by aircraft, and most died in their minefields or due to shipwrecks. Most of the Soviet aircraft were destroyed on the ground by air attacks or shelling, especially in the last weeks of the city's defense, when the entire territory was shot through by Romanian artillery. The Soviet side claimed that about 200 Romanian aircraft and about 100 tanks were destroyed, which exaggerated the true losses by 10 and 5 times, respectively. Soviet reports also claimed that up to 160 thousand Romanian soldiers and officers were put out of action, which exaggerated the true losses by 1.7 times.

The myth of the Vyazemsky environment

The main myth of the Vyazemsky encirclement in October 1941 is that the defeat of the Soviet troops was due to the overwhelming numerical superiority of the Wehrmacht both in people and in military equipment. In reality, the Soviet

command had enough forces and means to repel the expected German offensive in the western direction, but on the condition that the troops operating there would be coordinated from a single center and the direction of the main attacks of the German troops would be correctly determined.

On September 30, 1941, in the defense zone of the Bryansk Front, General Andrei Eremenko, and on October 2, in the defense zone of the Western Front, General Ivan Konev and the Reserve Front of Marshal Semyon Budyonny, the troops of the German Army Group Center, Field Marshal von Bock, began the implementation of the Typhoon plan - a general offensive to Moscow. The directive on the transition to defense in the western direction was given by the Headquarters of the VTK only on September 27, 1941. There was no preparation for defense in three days

possibilities.

The number of personnel of Army Group Center at the beginning of October was 1,929 thousand people, of which about 1.8 million participated in Operation Typhoon. They had 1,387 aircraft and about 1,700 tanks. They were opposed by the troops of three Soviet fronts, which had 1,252 thousand personnel, up to 1,300 tanks, 936 aircraft, including 545 fighters on the front line of about 730 km. The command of the Western Front and the Headquarters of the Supreme High Command incorrectly determined the most probable direction of the enemy strike, believing that it would be delivered along the Smolensk-Moscow highway, although the data available at the headquarters of the fronts and at the Headquarters on the grouping of German troops made it possible to determine that the enemy would deliver the main blows on flanks to surround the Soviet troops defending on the outskirts of Moscow.

The deployment of the four armies of the Western and Reserve fronts on the rear defensive line was also a mistake. After

breaking through the defense, they could neither launch a counterattack nor delay the advance of the enemy and were defeated. It would be better to use them to hold the main line of defense.

Soviet troops in the Moscow direction were very poorly controlled. The commanders of the Western, Reserve and Bryansk fronts practically did not coordinate their actions with each other. The Stavka headed by Stalin did not carry out such vital coordination. Even worse was the fact that the troops of the Western and Reserve fronts were deployed in alternating bands, and most of the armies of the Reserve Front, being the second echelon of the Western, were not subordinate to the commander of this latter. Due to the lack of radio communications and combat experience, the commanders of the armies and fronts relied more on wire communications and on delegates sent to the troops. But in combat conditions, wire communications often broke, and the delegates could not find the headquarters, which often changed their place of deployment due to the fact that the enemy had broken through the front and had to quickly retreat.

The three fronts had 16 armies, which, in turn, were subordinate to 95 divisions and 13 tank brigades. On average, one army headquarters accounted for 7 and a half divisions and about one tank brigade. This was one and a half to two times more than in one German army corps, numbering from 3 to 5 divisions. After the catastrophic defeats of the first months of the war, due to a lack of staff personnel, the corps headquarters were liquidated. But in fact, the role of the corps began to be played by the armies, and the role of the armies - by the fronts, the number of which was constantly growing. In

October 1941, three field armies and three tank groups subordinate to them advanced on Moscow. All of them were combined into one army group "Center". Accordingly, the following structure would be optimal for the Soviet troops opposing them: one front, 3-4 armies, 16 corps headquarters. But the number of divisions could easily be reduced so as not to overload the corps headquarters. After all, our troops had less means of communication than the Germans. Therefore, it would be worthwhile to have fewer divisions, but relatively larger numbers, in order to reduce the total number of divisions and thereby increase the provision of their headquarters with radio stations. But the Soviet

The rate, on the contrary, reduced the staff of the division, increasing their total number.

The commanders of the Soviet fronts, quickly losing contact with the troops, went to those armies that, as they thought, were subjected to the main blows of the enemy, leaving their headquarters in their former places of deployment. The same thing happened to many army commanders. As a result, the troops received conflicting orders from the commanders and their headquarters, as well as from the Headquarters. In parallel, the commanders were looking for their headquarters, the headquarters for the commanders, and the Stavka for both. The order to withdraw was received only on the evening of October 5, but already on October 7, the tank groups of Guderian and Goth closed the ring around Vyazma. And only on October 12, all the troops operating in the western direction were united under the command of the newly appointed commander of the Western Front, Georgy Zhukov. There were almost no Soviet troops left between the German vanguards and Moscow. German

reconnaissance units reached the outskirts of the capital. But the Wehrmacht invaded the USSR with only a three-month supply of fuel, which ran out by mid-October. To continue the offensive, it was necessary to bring food, gasoline and ammunition, and this was prevented by mud. In addition, up to 14 German divisions were fettered by an encircled grouping that held out until October 20, which was led by the commander of the 19th Army, General Mikhail Lukin. The Germans took 663 thousand prisoners, captured 1242 tanks and 5412 guns. This was the largest number of prisoners and trophies taken by the Wehrmacht in one environment. German losses in killed and wounded did not exceed 50 thousand people. 85 thousand people managed to get out of the Vyazemsky "cauldron", and about 23 thousand people from the Bryansk one. Another 98 thousand military personnel of three fronts escaped encirclement. There were no more troops on the distant approaches to Moscow at that moment. Thanks to the resistance of the encircled, time was won for organizing the defense of Moscow. But to an even greater extent, the thaw that began in the second half of October did not allow the Wehrmacht to immediately develop an offensive against Moscow and use its advantage in the mobility of troops. The former commander of the 3rd Panzer Group, G. Goth, not without reason, asserted: "It was not the Russian winter, but the autumn rains that put an end to the German offensive. It rained day and night

The rain fell continuously, interspersed with snow. The roads were wet and traffic stopped. The lack of ammunition, fuel, lubricants and food determined the tactical and operational situation for the next three weeks "- until mid-November, when it froze and the Germans were able to launch a large-scale offensive in the Moscow direction. But no less important was the fact that the new commander of the Western Front, G.K. Zhukov, managed to create a fairly strong defense on the outskirts of the capital from the surviving troops and divisions transferred from the east.

The myth of the Moscow battle

There are two kinds of myths associated with the defense of Moscow and the Soviet counteroffensive. On the one hand, many, especially outside of Russia, see the victory of the Red Army in the Battle of Moscow as a miracle. For the only time in the entire Soviet-German war, the Wehrmacht had a very significant superiority in people and equipment, but was never able to realize it. On the other hand, Soviet historiography insisted that the victory near Moscow was primarily a consequence of the superiority of the socialist system over the capitalist one and the incredible resilience of the Soviet people and their belief in the ultimate triumph of communism. At the same time, the objective factors that ensured the Soviet victory were

ignored. On October 18, Stalin sent telegrams to the Ural, Siberian and Volga districts, demanding that the 40 divisions available there be prepared by the end of November for the introduction into battle. They played an important role both in the defense of the capital, and especially in the counteroffensive.

On October 20, a state of siege was declared in the capital and a curfew was introduced from midnight to 5 in the morning. The GKO decree on martial law ordered provocateurs, spies and other agents of the enemy who called for a violation of order to be shot on the spot.

Stalin, despite the threat of the fall of the city, remained in Moscow. Reserves were placed at Zhukov's disposal, and by the beginning of November he managed to stop the enemy offensive, although the Germans managed to occupy Mozhaisk and Kalinin. Here, the ability of the Soviet totalitarian system to endure the most severe defeats steadfastly had an effect due to the lack of both an organized opposition and access to truthful information for the

bulk of the population. One of the important reasons for the collapse of the campaign against Moscow was that the German command, intoxicated by the scale and speed of the victory at Vyazma and Bryansk, conceived an overly wide encirclement of Moscow, for which there were not enough forces and means. Another reason was the extremely energetic actions of the newly appointed commander of the Western Front, Zhukov,

who managed in a very short time to create a new front from the reserves transferred from the depths of the country and the remnants of the armies that escaped from the

encirclement. Also, weather conditions interfered more with the Wehrmacht than with the Red Army. Due to the slush, the Germans could only advance along the main highways, which made it easier for the defenders. The Wehrmacht was able to resume the general offensive against Moscow only on November 16, when the ground was frozen and the mud was over. During this time, reserves were brought up to the Western and Kalinin fronts, which were enough not only for a successful

defense, but also for a counteroffensive. The Germans sent 51 divisions to Moscow, including 13 armored and 7 motorized. But all of them were far from complete, as they had not been replenished since the beginning of the Eastern campaign. Von Bock planned to encircle Moscow even before the onset of severe frosts, defeating the flank groups of Soviet troops. But he did not have enough strength to implement such an extensive plan, just as he did not have the strength to carry out a frontal assault on Moscow. However, Hitler had long banned such an assault, fearing heavy Wehrmacht lo

Soviet resistance increased, and the density of defense increased as the retreat towards Moscow increased. Already on November 21, von Bock seriously doubted that his troops would be able to take Moscow. At the end of November, the enemy managed to capture the area of Klin, Solnechnogorsk, Istra. But further progress was prevented by the discharge of water from the Istra, Ivankovsky reservoirs and the reservoirs of the Moscow Canal produced by the Soviet side. As a result, a water stream up to 2.5 m high and up to 50 km long was formed. By the beginning of

December, the German divisions were separated from the capital by only 25–30 km. The reconnaissance detachment even crossed the Moscow-Volga canal, but, having received no support, returned

back. By the end of November, the German offensive against Moscow had fizzled out. Halder wrote in his diary on November 29 von Bock's opinion that "if the offensive now launched against Moscow fails ... then Moscow will become a second Verdun, i.e., the battle will turn into a fierce frontal massacre." The Wehrmacht is exhausted. The lack of frost-resistant fuel and oils and the lack of winter uniforms also affected. Army Group Center carried

big losses frostbitten. Fresh divisions from the Far East were transferred to Moscow. It became increasingly clear that Japan would direct its aggression against the US and the British Empire to seize vital raw materials and oil. By that time, the Red Army had lost 23 thousand tanks (the Wehrmacht - 2250), all the aircraft stationed in the West, and almost the entire personnel of the ground forces. However, there remained personnel divisions located beyond the Urals and in Central Asia, and millions of untrained conscripts. In the Urals, where enterprises from the occupied territories were evacuated, new military equipment was produced, although the total volume of industrial production fell by almost half. Help began to arrive from England and the United States, which made it possible to reduce the shortage of gasoline and explosives.

By the end of the defensive battle, Army Group Center is forced to go on the defensive in the positions reached during the offensive, completely unprepared to repel the upcoming Soviet counteroffensive. She had no reserves left, while the Western and Kalinin fronts still had five fresh armies in the rear. On December 5, the troops of the Kalinin Front, and on

December 6, the troops of the Western Front and the right wing of the Southwestern Front launched a counteroffensive against the flank groupings of Army Group Center, which were trying to capture Moscow. Soviet troops numbered about 1.1 million people. Approximately the same number of soldiers and officers remained in the Army Group Center, which suffered especially heavy losses as frostbite. As a result of the Soviet counter-offensive, the Germans

were thrown back from Moscow by 100–250 km. The Moscow, Tula and Ryazan regions, as well as a number of districts of the Kalinin, Smolensk and Oryol regions, were completely liberated. However, the Soviet troops failed to encircle any large forces of the German troops and defeat, as planned, the Army Group Center. The 9th German Army held the Rzhev-Vyazemsky bridgehead, from which it continued to threaten Moscow.

Zhukov strove to be strong everywhere, striking with spread fingers rather than a clenched fist. However, the same shortcomings were inherent in other commanders. Yes, December 12

Stalin instructed Konev over a direct wire: "Instead of leaning on the enemy with all your might and creating a decisive advantage for yourself, you ... bring individual units into action, allowing the enemy to wear them out." During the

counteroffensive, Soviet troops suffered heavy losses. Only one 323rd Rifle Division of the 10th Army of the Western Front in three days of fighting, from December 17 to 19, 1941, lost 4138 people, including 1696 dead and missing. This gives an average daily loss rate of 1346 people, including 565 irretrievable losses. The entire German Eastern Army, numbering more than 150 divisions, for the period from December 11 to December 31, 1941 inclusive, had an average daily loss rate only slightly higher. On the day the Germans lost 2658 people, including only 686 - irretrievably. In a directive letter from the Headquarters to the military councils of the

fronts and armies dated January 10, 1942, it was stated: "In order to delay our advance, the Germans went on the defensive and began to build defensive lines with trenches, barriers, and field fortifications. The Germans are counting in this way to delay our offensive until spring, so that in the spring, having gathered strength, they will again go on the offensive against the Red Army. The Germans therefore want to buy time and get a respite. Our task is not to give the Germans this respite, to drive them westward without stopping, to force them to use up their reserves before the spring, when we will have new large reserves, and the Germans will have no more reserves, and thus ensure full defeat of the Nazi troops in 1942. Formally, the counter-offensive near Moscow ended on April 20, 1942, when the encircled grouping of four divisions of the 33rd Army,

advancing on Vyazma, was liquidated. The army commander, General Mikhail Efremov, being seriously wounded and not wanting to be captured, shot himself. The failure of the offensive of the 33rd Army was due to the fact that, as noted in the General Staff, analyzing the failure of the Vyazemsky operation, "The Western Front did not create a fist in the form of a large powerful grouping from all branches of the military in a decisive direction, with the help of which it would solve the problem of a large operational scope. Forces and means were almost evenly

distributed across a vast front. The loud orders given by the commander of the Western Front were impossible to carry out. Not a single order for the entire operation was carried out on time by the troops. They remained bare unnecessary paper, which did not reflect the actual position of the troops and did not represent a valuable operational document. At a haste, which the command of the Western Front showed, was transferred to the troops and brought great harm to the cause.

Soviet irretrievable

losses during the counter-offensive near Moscow exceeded the German ones by dozens of times. For example, in January 1942, the irretrievable losses of the Wehrmacht on the Eastern Front amounted to 25,249 people, and the Soviet irretrievable losses - 628 thousand people, which gives a ratio of 24.9:1. In February, German irretrievable losses reached 25,131 people, and Soviet - 523 thousand people, exceeding the losses of the enemy by 22.6 times. At the same time, taking into account the wounded and frostbite, the ratio of losses was somewhat more favorable for the Soviet side, although it still remained in favor of the Germans.

Myth 28 Panfilov heroes

In the myth of the 28 Panfilov heroes, both their number and the assertion that they achieved success at the cost of their life, stopping the German tanks.

According to the official version, created by journalists of Soviet newspapers in hot pursuit, on November 16, 1941, 28 fighters, led by political instructor Vasily Klochkov, of the 316th division, General Ivan Panfilov (the next day transformed into the 8th guards division), at the Dubosekovo junction, stopped the advance of 50 German tanks, destroying 18 of them, but all died in battle. They were posthumously awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union. An investigation conducted after the war by the MGB and the military prosecutor's office showed that not 28 "Panfilovian guardsmen" participated in the famous battle at the Dubosekovo junction, but a full company of 120–140 people, which was crushed by German tanks, having managed to damage only 56 of them. No more than 25-30 fighters survived, the rest died or were captured. Among the dead was the political instructor of the 4th company of the 1075th rifle regiment Vasily Georgievich Klochkov. The company commander, Captain Pavel Mikhailovich Gundilovich, remained alive in that battle and died only in April 1942. The mistake crept into the first newspaper reports about the feat of the Panfilovites, since the journalists, according to political workers, decided that the company was incomplete and consisted of only 30 people. Since it was known that at the beginning of the battle two Red Army soldiers had defected to the Germans, the editor-in-chief of Krasnaya Zvezda, David Ortenberg, subtracted two traitors from 30 and got the number 28, which became canonical. But in the essay, he allowed to write only about one traitor, whom the soldiers allegedly shot right there. Two traitors, and even 30 people, would be too many and would not allow talking about an insignificant renegade. The former commander of the 1075th Infantry Regiment, Colonel Ilya Vasilyevich Kaprov, described the famous battle in his testimony during the investigation: "The fourth company was commanded by Captain Gundilovich, political instructor Klochkov ... She occupied the defense - Dubosekovo, Petelino. By November 16, 1941, there were 120–140 in the company

Human. My command post was located behind the Dubosekovo siding at the crossing booth about 1 1/2 km from the positions of the 4th company. I do not remember now whether there were anti-tank rifles in the 4th company, but I repeat that in the entire 2nd battalion there were only 4 anti-tank rifles. By November 16, the division was preparing for an offensive battle, but the Germans were ahead of us. From the early morning of November 16, 1941, the Germans made a large air raid, and then a strong artillery preparation, hitting the position of the 2nd battalion especially hard.

At about 11 o'clock, small groups of enemy tanks appeared in the battalion's sector. In total, there were 10–12 enemy tanks in the battalion's sector. How many tanks went to the sector of the 4th company, I do not know, or rather, I cannot determine. With the resources of the regiment and the efforts of the 2nd battalion, this German tank attack was repulsed. In the battle, the regiment destroyed 5-6 German tanks, and the Germans withdrew ... At about 14.00-15.00, the Germans opened heavy artillery fire on all positions of the regiment, and the German tanks again went on the attack. Moreover, they marched in a deployed front, in waves, approximately 15-20 tanks in a group. More than 50 tanks attacked the regiment's sector, and the main attack was directed at the positions of the 2nd battalion, since this sector was most accessible to enemy tanks. Within about 40-45 minutes, enemy tanks crushed the location of the 2nd battalion, including the sector of the 4th company, and one tank even went to the location of the regiment's command post and set fire to the hay and the booth, so that I only accidentally managed to get out of dugout; I was saved by the railroad embankment. When I got over the railway embankment, people who survived the attack of German tanks began to gather around me. The 4th company suffered the most from the attack; led by the company commander Gundilovich, 20-25 people

survived, the rest all died. The rest of the companies suffered less ... "Thus, Gundilovich's company could knock out only 5-6 tanks, and 50 tanks attacked not this company, as the legend says, but the entire regiment. The Germans considered the first unsuccessful attack as a reconnaissance in force, after which they launched a powerful artillery attack and easily crushed the resistance. The legend claimed that the Panfilovites de

incendiary mixture, while in reality the losses of tanks from these weapons were extremely small.

The reason for such a quick and crushing defeat was that the command of the regiment evenly distributed anti-tank weapons among all companies, while the most tank-dangerous direction was where the 4th company was defending. Also, the "historical words" of political instructor Klochkov were not uttered: "Russia is great, but there is nowhere to retreat. There, behind, Moscow. The executive secretary of the "Red Star" Alexander Krivitsky admitted during interrogation in 1948 that he invented these words in his article. Kaprov also admitted that "he never told anyone about the battle of 28 Panfilov's men, and he could not speak, since there was no such battle. I did not write any political report on this matter. I do not know on the basis of what materials they wrote in the newspapers, in particular in Krasnaya Zvezda, about the battle of 28 guards from the division named after Panfilov. The names of 28 Panfilov heroes for presentation to the title of Hero of the Soviet Union were randomly selected by Captain Gundilovich from among more than 100 company fighters who died and went missing in the battle on November 16. Among those who received the posthumous title of Hero were people who were captured and then served in the Wehrmacht or the German auxiliary police. The request of one of them, Sergeant Ivan Dobrobabin (Dobrobaba), who served in the police in his native village in Ukraine in 1942-1943, to receive the Gold Star due to him caused a post-war investigation. Dobrobabin was sentenced to 15 years in camps in 1948 for treason and released under an amnesty in 1955.

The myth of Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya

The myth about the feat of Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya lies in the fact that it was never said about the implementation of the Stalinist order, according to which the settlements left by the Soviet troops, as well as the stocks of fuel, food and fodder, should be destroyed, if possible, in order to prevent the Germans from winter quarters. The Soviet version of the feat of the “partisan Tanya” (as Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya was called in the first essays) did not say that she was betrayed by one of her fellow partisans and that the locals were far from delighted with this feat, which threatened to set fire to the entire village, and severely beat the captured captured partisan.

Zoya Anatolyevna Kosmodemyanskaya is the Soviet Jeanne d'Arc. A schoolgirl, born in 1923 in the Tambov village with the poetic name Osinovye Gai, at the end of November 1941 burned down a stable with German horses in the village of Petrishchevo near Moscow. She was captured and on November 29, after severe torture, she was hanged by the Germans, without giving her real name to the enemies. Zoya Anatolyevna Kosmodemyanskaya became the first woman to be awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union during the Great Patriotic War (posthumously). The corresponding decree is dated February 16, 1942.

The most common version of the feat of Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya is set out in the first essay “Tanya” (this name was given to Zoya during her arrest) by Pravda correspondent Pyotr Lidov, published on January 27, 1942: “One night ... the stable of a German military unit was destroyed and there were seventeen horses in it. The next evening the partisans again came to the village. He made his way to the stable, in which there were over 200 horses ... Approaching the stable, the man ... poured gasoline from a bottle and bent down to strike a match. At that moment, the sentry crept up to him and wrapped his arms around him from behind ... Partizan managed to grab a revolver, but he did not have time to shoot. The soldier knocked the weapon out of his hands and raised the alarm. The partisan was led into the house, and then they saw that she was a girl, quite young, tall, swarthy, black-browed, with lively dark eyes

dark, cropped, combed-up hair." Subsequently, it was replicated in many books and articles.

Meanwhile, the same Lidov, in the essay "New about Tanya", published in the small-circulation newspaper Pravdist on May 5, 1942, differently illuminated the circumstances of the death of Kosmodemyanskaya: "The Germans did not themselves catch the partisan, she was betrayed by her comrade and peer, who was walking along with her on the fateful night of November 26, who at the same time was supposed to throw his incendiary bottle. He chickened out at the last minute, he was afraid of being hanged by the Germans, but was shot by the Russians. Vasily Klubkov chickened out and was caught.

Zoya was not afraid, she did her job and went to the appointed place. She could have gone further into the depths of the forest, but she did not want to leave her comrade in danger. Zoya trustingly waited for Klubkov, but instead of him, the German soldiers sent by him came to the edge.

Zoya was interrogated in the presence of Klubkov. She refused to identify herself, refused to answer where and why she came. She said that she did not know Klubkov and that she was seeing him for the first time.

Then the officer looked at Klubkov. Klubkov said: "She is lying, we are from the same detachment. We did the job together. Her name is Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya, Boris Krainov was also with us ... "

Under Klubkov, Zoya was stripped naked and beaten with rubber sticks, after that she said: "Kill me, but I will not tell you anything."

After some time, Klubkov returned to Moscow, to the very unit in which he had joined a few months earlier as a volunteer fighter. This time he came here as a German spy." Klubkov was shot on April 16, 1942.

The appearance of a traitor partisan not only explains how the identity of "Tanya" was established, but also makes us look at the circumstances of her execution differently. It turns out that the Germans did not need anything from Zoya. Her real name was known from Klubkov, who also probably indicated the location of the partisan detachment. So the soldiers tortured Zoya out of pure sadism, avenging the dead horses.

Kosmodemyanskaya was one of the thousands of "torch-bearers" who carried out the Stalinist order, which ordered the partisans to destroy houses and outbuildings in German-occupied settlements. Residents of Petrishchev and other villages from

The actions of Zoya and her colleagues were not enthusiastic, and even after the war they remembered Kosmodemyanskaya with an unkind word. But Zoya's personal moral feat does not detract from all this. The girl did not bow her head in front of the enemy and already under the gallows threw in the face of the executioners: "We are two hundred million, you can't outweigh everyone!" Here is that rare case where the essence of the feat was not distorted by the myth.

After the outbreak of war, after graduating from a sabotage school, on November 4, 1941, Zoya, as part of a reconnaissance and sabotage group, was transferred over the front line in the Volokolamsk region. The task of the group was to carry out Stalin's "scorched earth" tactics, formulated in the order of 17 November. He demanded to deprive the Germans "of the opportunity to settle down in villages and cities, drive the German invaders out of all settlements into the cold in the field, smoke them out of all premises and warm shelters and make them freeze in the open air", for which "destroy and burn to the ground all settlements in the rear of the German troops at a distance of 40-60 km in depth from the front line and 20-30 km to the right and left of the roads. The fighters of the group were supposed to burn houses and outbuildings in the villages occupied by the Germans. On November 27, at night, Boris Krainov, Vasily Klubkov and Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya set fire to three houses in the village of Petrishchevo, destroying 20 horses. Klubkov was captured and indicated the place where he was to meet with his comrades. Zoya was captured there, and Krainov, late for the rendezvous point and without waiting for his comrades, returned safely to his own. Klubkov was sent across the front lines as a German agent, he was exposed in Moscow and shot. The figure of Klubkov fell out of the myth of Kosmodemyanskaya. The traitor was superfluous here, because he could lead to unhappy reflections that there were no less traitors than heroes. It was not indicated in the Soviet essays that the local residents, whose houses

were damaged by the fire, participated in the beating of Kosmodemyanskaya and even doused her with slop. So, one of the victims of the fire, Agrafena Smirnova, before the execution, hit her on the legs with a stick, shouting: "Who did you harm? She burned my house, but did nothing to the Germans ... "After the return of the Soviet troops, A. Smirnova and Fedosya Solina, who had beaten Zoya, were shot. On the morning of November 29, Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya was hanged. Before her death, Zoya shouted: "Comrades, victory will be ours. German

soldiers, before it's too late, surrender... No matter how much you hang us, you don't outweigh everyone, we are 170 million. But our comrades will avenge you for me!"

The myth of the defense of Sevastopol

The main myth of the heroic defense of Sevastopol by the Soviet troops in November 1941 - early July 1942 is the assertion that this defense significantly influenced the German plans on the southern wing of the Soviet-German front. Equally mythological is the assertion that the losses of the German and Romanian troops during the siege of Sevastopol were much greater than the losses of the defenders. By the end of September 1941,

German troops had overcome the Perekop positions, capturing 10,000 prisoners. After the 11th German-Romanian army broke through the Yushun positions on October 28, 1941 and occupied the main part of the Crimea by mid-November 1941, the Soviet command decided to hold the main base of the Black Sea Fleet - Sevastopol, supplying it with sea, until the Soviet troops they will not land on the Kerch Peninsula and will not start an operation to liberate Crimea. At the right moment, the defenders of Sevastopol were to strike towards the landing force, and then, by joint efforts, defeat Manstein's army. The troops of the 51st separate army of General F.I. Kuznetsov, who defended the Crimea, suffered heavy losses and retreated to Kerch in disorder. By November 16, German troops cleared the Kerch Peninsula from the enemy. The remnants of the 51st Army until November 16 were evacuated to the Taman Peninsula. Back in the first half of October, the Separate Primorsky Army of General I.E. Petrov was transferred to the Crimea from Odessa, numbering up to 80 thousand people, 19 tanks and 500 guns. On October 24, she launched a counterattack on Manstein's troops, but failed and retreated to Sevastopol as part of five rifle and three cavalry divisions.

The Sevastopol defensive region had dozens of fortified gun positions, minefields, etc. The defense system also included two so-called "armored batteries" (BB), or forts, armed with 350-mm large-caliber artillery, taken from the battleship "Empress Maria". On October 30, 1941, German troops reached the distant approaches to

Sevastopol, and on November 2 they reached the outer line of defense of the fortress. At the beginning of the defense of the defenders of Sevastopol, there were only about 20 thousand people. These were parts of the Marine Corps and training units. But the Germans also reached the Sevastopol borders only with their vanguards. The main forces of the Separate Primorsky Army soon arrived in the fortress. The rearguard of the 51st separate army, the 184th division of the NKVD, also retreated there. On November 11, the main forces of the 11th Army approached the city, including 4 infantry divisions, an impromptu motorized brigade and a Romanian corps of two mountain rifle brigades. Until November 21, German attacks on Sevastopol continued, but it was not possible to take the fortress on the move. By that time, the number of defenders of the city exceeded 100 thousand people, and they were not inferior in this indicator to the enemy, who, moreover, did not have tanks and assault guns at all to develop success. The Soviet troops had strong artillery

and relied on long-term fortifications. After the armies of the Crimean Front landed on the Kerch Peninsula at the end of December 1941, the main forces of the 11th Army were diverted to fight them. Before the Crimean Front was defeated in May 1942, the Germans limited themselves to the siege of Sevastopol, subjecting the city to artillery fire. The Germans also used heavy siege artillery, including heavy 210mm howitzers and heavy 300mm and 350mm howitzers from World War I. Unique super-heavy siege weapons were also used:

6 Gamma-type howitzers with a caliber of 420 mm and 3 Karl-type mortars with a

caliber of 600 mm. Near Sevastopol, also for the first and last time, a super-heavy 800-mm Dora-class gun weighing 1000 tons and moving by rail was used. It fired 50 shells, each weighing 7 tons. More than 4 thousand soldiers and officers were employed in servicing and transporting the gun. Dora's shells were directed against armored forts and ammunition depots in the rocks. One of the shells penetrated 30 meters of rock and destroyed the ammunition depot. Given the fact that a special railway track had to be laid to the position of the Dora, Manstein considered the use of this weapon ineffective. the same

results could be achieved with guns of smaller calibers and aviation, without diverting so many forces and means to their maintenance.

On June 7, 1942, the last German assault on Sevastopol began. On June 17, they reached the approaches to Sapun Mountain, captured the forts "Stalin" and "Maxim Gorky-1" and the foot of the Mekenziev Heights. Now the German artillery could bombard the Northern Bay and practically paralyzed the supply of reinforcements and ammunition. The anti-aircraft artillery in Sevastopol ran out of shells, and the Luftwaffe won absolute air supremacy. The defense of the city became impossible, but the command of the Sevastopol defensive region and the Headquarters did not take care of the evacuation in time, hoping to keep the city to the last. On the night of June 29, without artillery preparation, the German landing in inflatable boats suddenly attacked the well-fortified southern coast of the Sevastopol Bay and captured Mamaev Kurgan on June 30. Only then did the defenders of Sevastopol, who ran out of ammunition, receive permission to evacuate. Only about 2 thousand people were taken out by planes and submarines, mainly from the highest command and political staff, including the commander of the Primorsky Army Ivan Petrov and the commander of the SOR and the Black Sea Fleet Philip Oktyabrsky and other senior officers and political workers. Stalin, fearing that his generals would be captured and, God forbid, follow the example of General A. A. Vlasov, first of all sought to evacuate them from the encirclement. The rest of the defenders of Sevastopol were left without command and were practically left to the mercy of fate. On July 1, organized resistance ceased, but separate scattered groups of Red Army men and sailors continued to resist until July 4, hoping in vain that ships would come for them. The Germans captured 100 thousand prisoners, 622 guns, 26 tanks and 141 aircraft. During the defense of Sevastopol, the Black Sea Fleet also lost, mainly sunk from the air, the Chervona Ukraine cruiser, 4 destroyers, 4 large transports, S-32 and Shch-214 submarines.

During the defense of Sevastopol, contrary to popular belief, the Separate Primorsky Army fettered the equal forces of the Germans and Romanians, who, however, in recent weeks had a complete

dominance in the air and overwhelming superiority in providing ammunition. Despite Soviet domination of the sea, the supply of Sevastopol, and then the evacuation of its defenders, were paralyzed with the help of aviation. The main delay in the capture of Sevastopol was due to the need to eliminate the grouping of Soviet troops on the Kerch Peninsula. Hitler did not consider the diversion of the 11th Army to the siege of Sevastopol as a critical circumstance for the implementation of his plans on the southern wing of the Eastern Front. Therefore, after the capture of Sevastopol, the bulk of the 11th Army and siege artillery were transferred to Leningrad so that these troops, who had experience in storming fortified cities, tried to take the Soviet northern capital.

The myth of political instructor Filchenkov and four Red Navy heroes

For the same reasons as the feat of 28 Panfilov guardsmen, propagandists invented the feat of five Sevastopol sailors, led by political instructor Nikolai Filchenkov. It is very reminiscent of the feat of political instructor Klochkov and his comrades, and in time almost coincides with the battle at the Dubosekovo junction. But, unlike the case with the Panfilovites, the true circumstances of the last battle between Filchenkov and his comrades were never reconstructed during the investigation and trial. Therefore, today we cannot say anything definite about

this account.

In the official submission to the title of Hero of the Soviet Union Nikolai Filchenkov, Vasily Tsibulko, Daniil Odintsov, Ivan Krasnoselsky and Yuri Parshin, it was stated that on November 7, 1941, in the area of the village of Duvankoy, "the enemy launched an attack with seven tanks and up to two companies of infantry to a height of 103.4. Tov. Shikaev (secretary of the party bureau of the 18th separate battalion, senior political instructor. - **B. S.**) organized a tank destroyer group led by senior political instructor (actually - political instructor. - **B. S.**) Filchenkov (in the decree on conferring the title of Hero of the Soviet Union it was wrong - Filchenko. - **B. S.**) ... He himself, with a heavy machine gun and two fighters, advanced to a firing position and began to cut off enemy infantry ... In this unequal battle, five sailors, led by Filchenkov, destroyed 3 fascist tanks, the rest, unable to withstand the onslaught of sailors turned back. The Nazis resumed the attack, already with the support of 15 tanks ... Wounded sailors did not leave the battlefield, destroying and incapacitating Nazi vehicles. The brave machine gunner V. G. Tsibulko was mortally wounded, and I. M. Krasnoselsky died a heroic death. They ran out of cartridges and bottles of flammable liquid. Then N. D. Filchenkov, tied with grenades, rushed under the tracks of an approaching tank. His example was followed by Yu. K. Parshin and D. S. Odintsov. In this battle, the sailor heroes destroyed up to 10 enemy tanks. The enemy was

stopped."

In more detail about the battle on November 7, L. N. Efimenko, the former commissar of the neighboring 18th separate battalion of the 8th separate marine infantry brigade, tells in his memoirs: "... Soon the main topic of conversation in the trenches was the feat accomplished ... battalion of marines ... The first information about this feat reached us through messengers and instantly spread throughout the brigade. However, at first no one knew the names of the heroes, and the details of everything that happened were presented in different ways. On the evening

of November 8, I connected with my neighbors by phone and asked the commissar of the eighteenth battalion, senior political officer Melnik, if he could come to the command post of the second battalion of our brigade closest to him. Forty minutes later we met there, and this is what I

heard: "Filchenkov let me know at the command post that tanks had shown up and that he and his Red Navy men would try to detain them. There were seven tanks, Filchenkov's group lay down on their way with grenades and bottles. The scouts knocked out three tanks. The rest turned back - the Germans, with a fright, must have not realized that there were only five of us ... And then fifteen tanks appeared there. We are already prepared to meet them at the forefront. But Filchenkov decided not to let them reach the battalion line. And he didn't allow it. Five sailors destroyed several more tanks. They had a decent amount of grenades, but, of course, they weren't enough for such a fight. The grenades are running out, and the tanks are climbing ... In order to somehow delay them, our guys began throwing their last grenades under the tracks. Filchenkov was the first, followed by two sailors, it seems, already wounded ... All five died. The last one, Vasily Tsibulko, died in the arms of our military assistant Petrenko. From him the main thing is known. We are clarifying the details - some people saw this fight from afar ... Three other sailors were called Ivan Krasnoselsky, Yuri Parshin and Daniil Odintsov, and I don't know anything more about them yet ... The battalion is

new, everyone is unfamiliar ... ". In all likelihood, here we have the original version of the legend. It differs from the later official one in one important detail. Filchenkov's group is called reconnaissance, not fighter, and nothing is said about the senior political instructor

I. L. Shikaev, who allegedly organized a group of tank destroyers and cut off the infantry from the tanks with machine-gun fire. From the story of Efimenko it is clear that Filchenkov's five are scouts operating in the rear of the Germans. The episode with the dying Tsibulko, before his death, reporting the details of the feat to military assistant Petrenko, is absolutely mythological and resembles the story of Natarov in the case of 28 Panfilov heroes.

A later version of the legend is reflected in the front leaflet of the end of 1941. It was stated that at the beginning of the battle, the machine gunner Tsibulko hit the observation slots of one of the tanks with a well-aimed burst. Then the Red Navy men burned three out of seven tanks with grenades and bottles. Approximately two hours later, another 15 tanks came to replace them and the main battle ensued: "Again, Tsibulko hits the viewing slots and knocks out one tank in the first burst. But then the cartridges ran out, and Tsibulko grabs the grenades, crawls towards the approaching tank, throws two grenades - the second tank is knocked out! He rushes to the third, throws the last grenades ... The third tank spun in place with a broken caterpillar, but Tsibulko himself was mortally wounded. Then, with four bottles in his hands, Krasnoselsky ran forward, with a well-aimed blow, he set fire to one tank, then another and fell, slain to death by the enemy. There were three left - Filchenkov, Parshin and Odintsov. Five German tanks are already fifty meters away. And then Filchenkov decided on an unprecedented deed - to stop the tanks with his own chest. He says goodbye to his comrades and ties grenades to his belt ... Filchenkov jumps up and rushes towards the advanced tank, towards death. The tank moves closer, the hero throws himself under the tracks. An explosion is heard, and the tank falls heavily on its side (just like a man! - **B.S.**). Following the example of their hero-commander, Parshin and Odintsov rush with grenades under the tanks. These two tanks also explode. And then an unprecedented thing happened: the remaining eight German tanks rapidly turned back (for a myth, such an "unheard of" is a common thing; just like in the official myth about the death of a Russian landing company near Ulus-Kert in Chechnya in March 2000, it is stated that the Chechens, having destroyed the paratroopers, were afraid of their courage and retreated, although there was no one left on their way. - **L**

in their lives, the heroes destroyed up to ten tanks and on that day blocked the enemy's road to Sevastopol with

their bodies ... "The leaflet also contained a happy ending: battalion comrades came to the aid of Filchenkov's five and pushed the Germans back from the battlefield, where they found Tsibulko bleeding. He managed to tell about the death of his comrades before his death.

The unreliability of the episode with five Sevastopol sailors is visible, as they say, to the naked eye. What was the point of throwing yourself under tanks with bundles of grenades? Only to weaken the force of the explosion with his own body? After all, if you managed to get close to the tank, it is much easier to throw a grenade or a bottle of combustible mixture under its caterpillar. But the propaganda required sacrifice. Heroes had to destroy the enemy at the cost of their own lives. This is how the myth of sailors throwing themselves under enemy tanks appeared.

A more detailed study leads to the conclusion that the episode with the five of political instructor Filchenkov has no real basis at all. The fact is that on November 7, 1941, the Sevastopol sailors, with all their desire, could not destroy 10 German tanks, since by this time the 11th German-Romanian army operating in the Crimea did not have a single tank or assault gun. This is reported by its former commander, Field Marshal Erich von Manstein, and modern Russian historians fully agree with him on this point. As the historian Boris Pereslegin writes, in the autumn of 1941, "everywhere in our documents, the offensive of Manstein's troops was invariably supported by groups of tanks that did not exist in nature in the amount of 30-50-70 pieces ... Manstein complains that he did not have a single tank, and, based on the general operational situation on the Eastern Front and the structure of the German armed forces, one cannot but believe in this. Mythical German tanks were needed by Soviet commanders only to justify their inglorious defeat in the Crimea in late October - early November 1941, when the remnants of the 51st Separate Army were evacuated to the Taman Peninsula in complete disarray and with heavy losses, and parts of the Separate Primorsky Army, failing to provide them with effective assistance, fell back to Sevastopol.

The Pearl Harbor myth

The main myth of the defeat by the Japanese of the main forces of the American Pacific Fleet at its main base of Pearl Harbor in the Hawaiian Islands lies in the legend that President Franklin D. Roosevelt and other American politicians and admirals deliberately provoked the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in order to get a weighty reason to join United States into World War II and overcome the resistance of the isolationists. This statement, developed by

a number of American revisionist historians, is based on the fact that at Pearl Harbor the Japanese destroyed and disabled all American battleships, while the aircraft carriers that were absent at the time of the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor survived, and later it was them, and battleships did not play a decisive role in the Pacific War. Supporters of this version believe that the troops and fleet in Hawaii were deliberately not put on high alert so that the Japanese attack would succeed and the sinking of the largest warships would be sufficient reason for American public opinion to justify abandoning the policy of neutrality and America's entry into World War II. To refute this version, it must be said that until the US entered the war, American admirals adhered to the traditional theory, according to which battleships played a decisive role in naval

operations. Only the success of the Japanese at Pearl Harbor and the subsequent successful use of aircraft carriers by the Americans in the battles in the Coral Sea and Midway in 1942 led the admirals to believe that the battleships were replacing the battleships as the decisive force in naval warfare with aircraft carriers. In the same way, politicians at that moment could not even guess that battleships had outlived their lives, and they would not risk American naval power like that. Moreover, the mere fact of the attack of the Japanese fleet on Pearl Harbor, regardless of its results, would be absolutely enough to declare war on Japan.

By the time on November 26, 1941, the Japanese aircraft carrier unit under the command of Vice Admiral Chuichi Nagumo set out on a campaign to Pearl Harbor from its base in the Kuril Islands, maintaining complete radio silence, the Japanese-American negotiations had finally reached an impasse. The Japanese government, in which the military had a decisive voice, hoped to gain hegemony in East Asia and provide Japan with raw materials, fuel and food. To do this, it was considered necessary to capture China, Burma, Malaysia, the Philippines, Indonesia and a number of Pacific islands. Here, Japan's main rival was the United States, which had a negative attitude towards the Japanese occupation of Indochina after the collapse of France and threatened the Land of the Rising Sun with economic sanctions - an oil embargo and freezing of Japanese assets in American banks. On July 26, 1941, after the Japanese refused to withdraw troops from French Indochina, Japanese assets in the United States were frozen and a fuel blockade of Japan was effectively introduced. One could guess that since Tokyo does not want to compromise, it will try to resolve the situation militarily in the near future. After all, without oil, Japan could not exist for a long time, much less continue the war in China and the occupation of French Indochina. However, American politicians and the military did not expect that Japan would dare to make such a risky operation as an attack on the Hawaiian Islands. Therefore, the attack on Pearl Harbor was sudden. The garrison, including air defense systems, was not put on alert, and the ships were not put out to sea and became a good target for the Japanese

aircraft.

The Japanese delegation in Washington was supposed to convey to the American side a statement about the termination of negotiations half an hour before the attack on Pearl Harbor, however, since the telegram was received late, they did not have time to decipher it, so the statement about the termination of negotiations followed a few hours after the attack on Pearl Harbor. Harbor. And the declaration of war was handed over to the American ambassador in Tokyo ten hours later.

after the attack.

The operation against Pearl Harbor was planned by the commander of the Japanese fleet, Admiral Yamamoto Isoroku. Nagumo connection

included six aircraft carriers: Akagi, Hiryu, Kaga, Shokaku, Soryu and Zuikaku, which housed 441 aircraft, including fighters, torpedo bombers, dive bombers and fighter-bombers. The aircraft carriers were guarded by 2 battleships, 2 heavy and 1 light cruisers and 9 destroyers. 2 more destroyers were sent to bombard Midway Atoll. The operation against Pearl Harbor also involved 6 submarines, which delivered dwarf submarines to the attack site. December 7, 1941 was followed by an attack on the main American naval base at Pearl Harbor in the Hawaiian Islands. 360 Japanese aircraft that rose from aircraft carriers caught the enemy by surprise. Although American intelligence deciphered the Japanese codes and sent a warning of a possible attack as early as November 27, they did not pay attention to it, considering such an operation unbelievable. A Japanese attack was expected against Indonesia, Malaysia or the Philippines. 4 American battleships, 2 destroyers, and one mine layer were sunk. The Americans lost 2,403 killed, including 68 civilians, and 1,178 were wounded, including 35 civilians. As a result, the Japanese won dominance in the Pacific Ocean for half a year. Three American aircraft carriers were at sea at the time of the attack, and one was being repaired in California. Some historians believe that this was the fluke that saved the Americans from complete collapse. If not only battleships, but also aircraft carriers, had died at Pearl Harbor, then it would have been much more difficult for the American fleet to restore its positions. It should be noted, however, that if there were aircraft carriers in Pearl Harbor, Japanese bombers would have to deal with fighters based on them, and Admiral Nagumo's aircraft carriers would have been attacked by American aircraft carriers. So in this case, the outcome of the battle could be much less favorable for the Japanese side than it actually was. The Japanese lost only 29 aircraft and another 74 were damaged, 20 of these latter beyond repair. The Japanese fleet also lost five small submarines, the effect of which was close to zero. The irretrievable losses of American aircraft at Pearl Harbor amounted to 188 aircraft. Another 155 vehicles were damaged. The Japanese lost 55 pilots and 9 submariners.

One submariner was taken prisoner. Another mistake of the Japanese was that they did not attack the warehouses of torpedoes and other ammunition, workshops and fuel depots, where there were 400 thousand tons of fuel oil. These losses would be much more difficult for the Americans to compensate for than the death of obsolete battleships (the newest ones were only damaged).

Myth ROA

The myth of the Russian Liberation Army (ROA), General Andrei Andreyevich Vlasov, originated during the period of its existence. On the one hand, it was claimed, following German propaganda, that this was a real army that was fighting together with the Wehrmacht against the Bolsheviks. On the other hand, as many surviving ROA officers claimed after the war in their memoirs, that Vlasov himself and most of the soldiers and commanders of the ROA were staunch opponents of Soviet power, and only suspicion on the part of Hitler and other top leaders of Nazi Germany did not allow them until the autumn of 1944 years to create a real army. Proposals to create a pro-German government in Russia were made

to the Germans by the Russians, and long before General Vlasov appeared in German captivity. So, as early as December 12, 1941, the commander of the Soviet troops encircled near Vyazma, Lieutenant-General Mikhail Fedorovich Lukin, who was taken prisoner by the seriously wounded, offered the German officers interrogating him the idea of \u200b\u200bcreating an anti-Soviet government of Russia: "The people will face an unusual situation: the Russians sided with the so-called enemy, it means that going over to them is not a betrayal of the Motherland, but only a departure from the system.

Vlasov himself, contrary to the allegations spread by Soviet propaganda, did not voluntarily go over to the side of the Germans, but was taken prisoner on July 11, 1942 in the village of Tukhovezhi, Oredezhsy district, Leningrad region. He commanded the encircled 2nd shock army. He was given to the Germans by local Old Believer peasants.

Once in captivity, Vlasov realized that his military career in the Red Army was over. In the event of a Soviet victory, under the most favorable circumstances for himself, he could count on the post of head of the military department at some university. Such was the fate of those generals who returned from captivity, who were lucky enough to avoid the Gulag or execution. But it was hard to believe in the victory of the Red Army in July 1942. And Vlasov decided

that it is better to be on the side of those whom he considered potential winners. On August 3, 1942, he addressed the German command with a letter, where he proposed to create a Russian army from prisoners of war. Formally, the ROA was created on December 27, 1942. However, until July 1944, the Russian Liberation Army (ROA) existed only as a propaganda slogan. It formally united all units and subunits of Russian volunteers in the Wehrmacht, from companies to battalions and regiments, but the German command actually disposed of them, and Vlasov had no real power over the soldiers and officers of the ROA. The German leadership was afraid to form large formations from Russian collaborators under Russian command. After all, since November 1942, when the German attack on the Caucasus and Stalingrad failed, many collaborators began to go over to the side of the Soviet partisans. The largest event of this kind was the defection to the side of the partisans in Belarus in August 1943 of the 1st Russian National SS Brigade, led by Colonel Vladimir Gil-Rodionov. Only in September 1944, after a meeting with Vlasov, SS Reichsführer Heinrich Himmler, on behalf of Hitler, allowed the

formation of the first two divisions of the Vlasov army. Politically, Vlasov was promised the restoration of Russia under his leadership within the pre-war borders. Vlasov issued a series of leaflets under his signature calling on the Red Army to surrender and start an armed struggle against the Stalinist regime. The criticism of the Soviet order in these leaflets was fair, but the image of the Germans-liberators of confidence among the population and prisoners, who were familiar with Hitler's "new order" firsthand, did not inspire confidence. Vlasov, in a letter "Why I took the path of fighting Bolshevism," published in March 1943, stated: "I saw how hard it was for the Russian worker, how the peasant was forcibly driven into collective farms, how millions of Russian people disappeared, arrested, without trial and consequences. I saw that everything Russian was trampled underfoot, that sycophants were promoted to leading positions in the country, as well as to command posts in the Red Army, people who did not care about the interests of the Russian people ... There, in the swamps, I finally came to the conclusion that my duty is to

to call on the Russian people to fight to overthrow the power of the Bolsheviks, to fight for peace for the Russian people, to stop the bloody, unnecessary war for the Russian people for foreign interests, to fight for the creation of a new Russia in which every Russian person could be happy. Later, in collaborationist newspapers, Vlasov was portrayed almost

as a new-found messiah, called to save Russia from the Bolsheviks. Many ROA fighters considered him a sincere fighter against Bolshevism. Although among them there were many who became a collaborator just to survive in German captivity. However, the entire previous biography of Vlasov contradicted the image of a fighter against Soviet power. In September 1941, Vlasov, commanding the 37th Army

defending Kyiv, was surrounded and went out to his own for a whole month. If he had already then had the idea of starting an armed struggle against Stalin in alliance with Germany, he could easily go over to the side of the Germans. After that, he successfully commanded the 20th Army, which liberated Volokolamsk during the counteroffensive near Moscow. Also, being surrounded by the 2nd shock army, Vlasov tried for almost a month to get to his own and was not going to

surrender.

And on February 14, 1942, in a letter to his field wife Agnessa Podmazenko, Vlasov enthusiastically described his meeting with Stalin: "The biggest and main owner called me to him. Imagine, he talked to me for an entire hour and a half. You can imagine how lucky I am. You won't believe such a big man and interested in our little family business. He asked me: where is my wife and in general about health. This can only be done by HE who leads us from victory to victory. With him we will smash the fascist reptile."

On November 14, 1944, the Committee for the Liberation of the Peoples of Russia was formed in Prague, headed by General Vlasov. As conceived by the Germans, it was to become the government of Germany-friendly Russia, liberated from the Bolsheviks. The program document of the KONR was the Manifesto of the Liberation Movement of the Peoples of Russia. The leaders of the KONR understood that the days of Nazi

Germany were numbered, and expected to try to further transfer the KONR

under the auspices of England and the United States, naively hoping that the ROA and other formations of the KONR would be recognized as allies. The authors of the manifesto stated: "The forces of imperialism are fighting, led by the plutocrats of England and the USA, whose greatness is built on the oppression and exploitation of other countries and peoples. The forces of internationalism are fighting, led by the clique of Stalin, who dreams of a world revolution and the destruction of the national independence of other countries and peoples. Freedom-loving peoples are fighting, eager to live their own lives, determined by their own historical and national development. The goals of the manifesto were proclaimed: "The overthrow of the Stalinist tyranny, the liberation of the peoples of Russia from the Bolshevik system and the return to the peoples of Russia of the rights won by them in the people's revolution of 1917. Cessation of the war and conclusion of an honorable peace with Germany. The calculation was that the return to the ideals and principles of the February Democratic Revolution should have aroused the sympathy of the Anglo-American public.

By mid-April, when the 1st division of the ROA fought the Red Army for the only time at the Oder bridgehead near Kustrin, Vlasov's army numbered about 50 thousand people. In the 1st division of General Sergei Bunyachenko there were 22 thousand people, in the 2nd division of General Grigory Zverev - 13 thousand people. The 3rd division of General Mikhail Shapovalov numbered 10 thousand people, but was in the process of formation and was poorly armed. In addition, there was a reserve brigade of Colonel Samuil Koida of 7 thousand people. After an unsuccessful battle on the Oder, Bunyachenko led his division to Prague. Other units of the ROA, as well as Vlasov's headquarters, also moved there. The Vlasovites decided to support the anti-German uprising in Prague, in the hope that the new Czechoslovak government would not hand them over to the Soviets. And they really helped the rebels, who could hardly hold back the onslaught of German troops seeking to break through Prague to the West. On May 7, Bunyachenko's division occupied the airfield and several important buildings. However, having learned that the Red Army would soon occupy Prague, the ROA units left Prague and, together with the Germans, began to retreat to the part of the Czech Republic occupied

On May 12, 1945, with the assistance of the Americans, Vlasov was captured by a mechanized battalion of Captain Mikhail Yakushev.

162nd Tank Brigade of the 25th Tank Corps of the 13th Army of the 1st Ukrainian Front near the city of Pilsen. In captivity, Vlasov immediately gave the order to the ROA to surrender the Red Army. The main part of the Vlasovites was extradited by the Western allies to the Soviet authorities, but some (up to 15 thousand people) managed to avoid extradition. At the trial, which was closed, Vlasov, according to the transcript, said: "The crimes I have committed are great, and I expect severe punishment for them. The first fall into sin is the surrender. But I not only completely repented, though late, but at the trial and investigation I tried to identify the whole gang as clearly as possible. I expect the most severe punishment." None of the twelve defendants - former leaders of the ROA and KONR - tried to defend the ideas for which they allegedly fought. On August 1, 1946, they were all hanged.

The myth of the partisan movement

The main myths associated with the partisan movement in the occupied Soviet territory during the Great Patriotic War are the assertions of Soviet propaganda that there was only a pro-Soviet (pro-communist) partisan movement. Until now, many Russian and foreign historians consider representatives of the non-Soviet partisan movement to be bandits and accomplices of the German invaders. It is also widely believed that the Soviet partisan war was an extremely effective weapon and had an almost decisive influence on the outcome of the struggle on the Soviet-German front. On the eve of the Great Patriotic War, all former partisan bases prepared in Ukraine and Belarus in case of invasion by enemy armies

were liquidated, and many future potential leaders of the partisan movement were repressed. Stalin was going to fight on foreign territory, and for this they needed not partisans, but small sabotage groups. However, such groups were not prepared in

enough.

Partisan detachments that spontaneously arose from encirclement and local supporters of Soviet power found themselves without food and ammunition supplies, as well as without walkie-talkies. But by the winter of 1941/42, special partisan groups sent from behind the front line and the most authoritative commanders and commissars managed to put together the first detachments, which caused considerable anxiety to the Germans. Disillusioned with the invaders, local residents began to help the partisans, replenishing their ranks or voluntarily supplying the partisans with food and warm clothing. The defeat of the German troops near Moscow contributed to the development of the partisan movement. Moscow immediately tried to put all the created partisan detachments under its control. At first, the partisan movement was led by the military councils of the respective fronts and representatives of the NKVD who were with them, as well as the Communist Party

union republics and regional committees of the occupied regions of the RSFSR. On May 30, 1942, at the Headquarters of the Supreme High Command, the Central Headquarters of the partisan movement was created, headed by the first secretary of the Communist Party of Belarus Panteleimon Kondratievich Ponomarenko. But he did not obey the Ukrainian headquarters of the partisan movement, which was headed by Politburo

member Nikita Khrushchev. The Central Headquarters of the partisan movement was finally abolished on January 13, 1944. The leadership of the partisans was transferred to the republican headquarters. Ponomarenko headed the largest of them - the Belarusian headquarters of the partisan movement. Now the liberation of the Soviet territory continued uninterruptedly, and it was more convenient for local headquarters to coordinate the interaction of partisans and units of the Red Army, as well as to supply partisan detachments with everything necessary. In the Baltic States and Bessarabia, a mass pro-Soviet partisan movement did not arise. In Ukraine, with the liberation of the Left Bank of the Dnieper, the actual partisan movement of a pro-Soviet orientation actually ceased and was reduced to raids by large partisan formations of Kovpak, Naumov, Saburov and others in the Western Ukrainian Carpathians. They were engaged in sabotage and, to a lesser extent, reconnaissance activities, attacked enemy garrisons, seized warehouses, destroyed railways and bridges, replenishing with communist supporters from among the local residents. However, they had to fight not only with the Germans and collaborationist formations, but also with units of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army and the Polish Home Army. The UPA detachments dominated Western Ukraine, while the AK detachments were most influential in Western Belarus, where they were more numerous than the Soviet partisan detachments. If the UPA fought both against the Germans and against the Soviet and Polish partisans and against the Red Army, then the Home Army fought both with the Germans and the UPA, but it itself did not attack the Red Army and Soviet partisans first, but only defended itself against their numerous attacks. Stalin and Ponomarenko, right up to the end of the war, were captivated by beautiful-hearted dreams that partisan detachments were capable of fighting the enemy mainly through weapons and

ammunition captured from the enemy. Meanwhile, at the expense of local resources, the partisans could supply themselves only with food and fodder, but not with weapons and ammunition. About this already after the war, on December 28, 1965, the former commander of the partisan detachment A. Andreev quite frankly wrote to Ponomarenko. He pointed out that the German warehouses and trains could not be the main source of supply for the partisans with explosives and ammunition, since it was difficult for the partisans to capture such a warehouse. After all, this requires a thorough defeat of the German garrisons, and this can only be done by large partisan formations and, in turn, requires a large expenditure of ammunition. Therefore, ammunition had to be delivered from the Center. Andreev complained: "How many opportunities were missed by the partisans only because of the constant acute shortage of weapons, ammunition, and the lack of explosives!"

Perhaps, if, as the experienced saboteur Ivan Starinov advised, the partisan movement focused on the actions of groups of qualified demolition workers equipped with a sufficient amount of explosives, on enemy communications, without being distracted by attacks on police garrisons and without chasing the numerical growth of detachments, this would bring more useful to the Red Army.

But Stalin demanded that the partisan movement be as massive as possible, and the partisan leaders were forced to obey, although mass character did not contribute to efficiency in any way, since there was still not enough ammunition for tens of thousands of freshly minted partisans. Often, the local population was simply mobilized into partisan detachments, but the reliability of such "partisans involuntarily" was not great. It was easier for the Germans to fight the

partisans if they united in large groups. To this end, German special agencies even distributed fake leaflets on behalf of the Soviet command with calls to unite in large detachments. Paradoxically, the position of the partisans became more difficult at the moment when the front line approached them and the liberation was already close. The Germans took measures to clear the rear of the army of partisans, and threw regular divisions against them, reinforced by police punitive detachments. Oppose regular formations that had superiority in level

training, armament and in providing ammunition, the partisans could not. So, in the final report of the 2nd German Panzer Army dated June 9, 1943 on the operation "Gypsy Baron", which was carried out in May - June against the main partisan bases in the southern part of the Bryansk forests, partisan losses were determined at 3152 killed and 869 defectors. According to the Central Headquarters of the Partisan Movement, from May 1 to July 1, 1943, the number of partisans in the Oryol region decreased from 14,323 people to 9,623 people, that is, by 4,600 people, and in the note to these figures it is specifically stipulated that "the reduction the number of detachments, partisans and radio stations as of 1 July 1943 is explained by losses in battles with punishers. As a result of this operation, the Wehrmacht was able to open the main communications in the area of the Bryansk forests and get rid of the partisan threat in the combat area of Army Group Center until the end of the Battle of Kursk and the evacuation of the Oryol bridgehead.

In the same way, the Germans managed to defeat the main partisan forces in the frontline zone of Army Group Center in April-June 1944, on the eve of the Soviet operation Bagration. The success of the Germans was greatly facilitated by the fact that since the autumn of 1943, 16-17 partisan brigades with a total strength of 16 to 20 thousand people were concentrated in the Polotsk-Lepel partisan zone. The Soviet command planned to capture Polotsk with the help of partisans. Then the landing corps was to be transferred there. However, the Soviet Headquarters forgot that in December-January there is mostly non-flying weather here, and scheduled the start of the operation for mid-December 43rd. However, it was canceled at the last minute due to bad weather. But the partisans were ordered to spend the winter in this area in order to try to capture Polotsk later. The Germans, taking advantage of the calm at the front, threw several Wehrmacht infantry regiments against the partisans, reinforced by SS and police units. Some of the partisans were able to break into the Minsk and Vileyskaya regions, but many died. According to the headquarters of the German 3rd Panzer Army, only in the period from April 11 to May 15, 1944, partisan losses amounted to 14,288 people killed and captured.

The total number of participants in the Soviet partisan movement can be estimated at about 0.5 million people. The

guerrillas were given a plan in Moscow for how many acts of sabotage on the railroad or attacks on enemy garrisons. When compared with German documents, it turned out that the reports of the partisans about the number of echelons derailed were sometimes overestimated by 5-6 times. According to directives from Moscow, the partisans reported on the number of undermined rails, which the Germans easily restored, including at the expense of roads that they did not use. If the partisans had concentrated on undermining strategically important bridges and destroying locomotives, the effect would have been much greater. In reality, the partisans failed to disrupt a single major operational transportation of the Wehrmacht in the East.

The myth of war crimes of the Wehrmacht and the SS in the occupied Soviet territory

The main myth associated with the war crimes of the Wehrmacht and the Waffen-SS on the territory of the USSR is the assertion that the German soldiers were exempted from any responsibility for crimes against the civilian population in the occupied Soviet territory and therefore committed a large number of unmotivated crimes - robberies, rapes and wanton murders. Indeed, before the invasion of the USSR, on May 13, 1941, a

directive was issued by the Chief of Staff of the OKW, Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel, according to which "the initiation of prosecution for actions committed by military personnel and service personnel in relation to hostile civilians is not mandatory even in those cases when these acts simultaneously constitute a war crime or misdemeanour. This opened up scope for any crimes against the civilian population, since the latter could always be accused of being hostile to German soldiers. Also, this directive provided German officers with the discretion to decide on the execution of civilians suspected of hostile intentions. However, such impunity had a corrupting effect on the troops. The Commander-in-Chief of the OKH, Field Marshal Walter von Brauchitsch, when dispatched to the troops, attached instructions to the order allowing not to apply this order if it creates a danger of undermining discipline. The commanders of army groups and armies were forced, shortly after the outbreak of hostilities, to issue orders introducing jurisdiction over military courts for crimes against civilians. In total, the German military archive in Freiburg preserved about 80 thousand criminal cases initiated against German soldiers in the East. These were both cases of desertion and crimes against peaceful

population. As a rule, for crimes against civilians, soldiers and officers of the Wehrmacht were not shot, but imprisoned or sent to penal units.

On June 6, 1941, the KV issued an order according to which Soviet political commissars were not recognized as prisoners of war: "Political commissars are the initiators of the barbaric Asian methods of warfare. Therefore, it is necessary to act against them immediately and without any delay with all ruthlessness. If they offer armed resistance, they should be immediately eliminated by force of arms ... They should be immediately, that is, right on the battlefield, separated from all other prisoners of war. This is necessary to deprive them of any opportunity to influence the captured soldiers. Commissars are not recognized as soldiers; no international legal protection applies to them. After sorting, they must be destroyed ... Political commissars who are not guilty of any hostile actions or are only suspected of them should not be destroyed initially. Only in the course of further advance inland can the question of whether they should be left in place or handed over to the Sonderkommandos be decided. We should strive for them to carry out the investigation themselves. In deciding the question of "guilty or innocence", in principle, a personal impression matters more than, in all likelihood, an unprovable corpus delicti. Thus, the fate of Soviet political workers was left to the discretion of the German commanders who captured them. The commissars could be shot, sent to a camp, or handed over to the Sonderkommandos of the SD, where in most cases

the commissars would die. The Order on Commissars was in effect until the spring of 1942. However, many commanders of armies and army groups refused to implement it from the very beginning. How many political workers were shot as part of the implementation of the "order on commissars", so far

unknown.

The Extraordinary State Commission "for establishing and investigating the atrocities of the Nazi invaders and their accomplices" in the period from June 1941 to December 1944 drew up 54,784 acts of atrocities against the civilian population in the occupied Soviet territories. Among these crimes

mention should be made of "the use of the civilian population in the course of hostilities, the forcible mobilization of the civilian population, the execution of civilians and the destruction of their homes, rape, the hunt for people - slaves for the German industry." It is also worth mentioning that many crimes are described only from the words of witnesses who were inclined to exaggerate them, and some military personnel seem to have been dictated by the SMERSH officers and military tribunals who interrogated and judged them. For example, at a meeting of the military tribunal of the 374th Infantry Division on November 29, 1944, Chief Corporal of the 4th Air Field Division Le Courte allegedly testified: "In his spare time, for the sake of his own interest, he was engaged in the execution of prisoners of war soldiers of the Red Army and civilians... In November 1942, I took part in the execution of 92 citizens. Since April, I took part in the execution of 55 Soviet citizens, I shot them ... In addition, I also participated in punitive expeditions, where I set fire to houses. In total, I burned more than 30 houses in different villages. As part of a punitive expedition, I came to the village, went into the houses and warned the population that no one should leave the houses, we would burn the houses. I set fire to houses, and if anyone tried to escape from the houses, no one was let out of the house, I drove them back into the house or shot them. Thus, I burned more than 30 houses and 70 civilians, mostly old people, women, children ... "It is absolutely incomprehensible why a prisoner of war admits to executions that were not part of his duties as a photographer at the airfield support commandant's office, if no one convicted his participation in specific executions. And the story that the defendant warned the peasants not to dare to run out of their houses when they were being burned looks like the fruit of the sick imagination of the investigators. Nevertheless, the record of Le Courte's trial was accepted as evidence by the Nuremberg Tribunal. The testimony of the captive chief corporal of the 2nd company of the 9th tank division, Arno Schwager, is no more credible: "When retreating from Kursk ... we received an order to burn all the points we left behind. If the urban population refused to leave their homes, then such residents were locked up and burned along with their houses ... "

At the same time, there is no doubt that the soldiers of the Wehrmacht and the SS, as well as the fighters of the police punitive units, including those formed from local collaborators, committed many war crimes, expressed in the execution of tens of thousands of hostages in response to the actions of partisans, as well as in the murders of civilians in the course of punitive operations against partisans. Keitel's directive of December 16, 1942 on the fight against "bandits" (i.e., partisans) stated: "The troops ... have the right and duty in this fight to use without restriction any means against also women and children, if their use leads to success".

In addition, as part of the "final solution of the Jewish question" in the occupied Soviet territory, the Einsatzgruppen SD (security services) destroyed up to 1.5 million local Jews and about 0.5 million Jews brought to the occupied Soviet territory from Western Europe. In operations to deport Jews to the ghettos and exterminate them, which constituted crimes against humanity, the Einsatzgruppen were assisted by the Wehrmacht and the SS troops, as well as local police forces. Also, several tens of thousands of nomadic gypsies were exterminated (the Germans did not touch settled gypsies). As early as July 2, 1942, the head of the RSHA (Main Security Directorate), SS Gruppenführer Reinard Heydrich, issued a directive according to which "Jews who were party members and employed in the public service, as well as other radical elements (saboteurs, saboteurs, propagandists, snipers, assassins, arsonists, etc.)..." The commanders of the German troops justified the repressions against the Jews by the fact that they were allegedly engaged in subversive activities. So, on November 20, 1941, the commander of the 11th German Army, General Erich von Manstein, issued an order stating: "A soldier must understand the need for cruel punishment of Jews - the bearer of the very spirit of Bolshevik terror. It is also necessary in order to nip in the bud all attempts at uprisings, which in most cases are organized by Jews.

The myth of "punished peoples"

The main myth of the "punished peoples" is that during the Great Patriotic War, Stalin deported a number of peoples of the USSR (Germans from the Volga region and other regions, Crimean Tatars, Chechens, Ingush, Kalmyks, etc.) due to his own irrational hatred for these peoples. In reality, the repressions

against certain peoples were explained solely by genuine or imaginary suspicions that the majority or a significant part of their representatives were collaborating with the German army and the occupying authorities.

There were a considerable number of collaborators among all the peoples of the Soviet Union, but only certain peoples were punished for this, as a rule, small ones, whose number did not exceed half a million people. Small ethnic groups that had ties with kindred peoples outside the USSR were also evicted. The Germans were considered unreliable because of their

nationality. Already on August 28, 1941, the Decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR was issued, which stated that among the German population of the Republic of Volga Germans there were "tens of thousands" of spies and saboteurs, who, however, the locals did not extradite to the NKVD. In order to avoid undesirable consequences, it was considered necessary to relocate the entire German population of the Republic of Volga Germans to other areas.

Novosibirsk and Omsk regions, Altai and Krasnoyarsk territories and North-Eastern Kazakhstan were chosen as places of resettlement. The Autonomous Republic of the Volga Germans was liquidated on 7 September. The deportation was carried out from 3 to 21 September. 451,800 Volga Germans were deported in 188 echelons. In total, 786.3 thousand Germans were deported, including from Ukraine and the North Caucasus. By October 1, 1945, their number, mainly due to increased mortality, decreased to 687.3 thousand people. In the winter of 1942, the Volga Germans were mobilized into the labor army, the regime of which differed little from

the Gulag regime. 33,516 German servicemen recalled from the front, including 1,609 officers, were also sent to the labor army.

In practice, in the Republic of Volga Germans, previously closed to foreigners, there were practically no German agents. Also, Germans from other regions were deported even before they had a real opportunity to cooperate with the German army and the occupying authorities.

11,500 Soviet Finns were

also deported as potential enemy agents. Many peoples of the Caucasus were punished for real mass

collaborationism. According to the Decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR of October 12 and the decision of the Council of People's Commissars of October 14, 1943, "due to the fact that during the occupation many Karachays behaved treacherously", about 70 thousand citizens were deported from the Karachay Autonomous Region to the Kazakh and Kirghiz SSR Karachay nationality. The deportation began on 7 November. The Karachai detachments really attacked the retreating Soviet units and helped the Germans take the Klukhorsky pass. However, most of the collaborators left with the retreating German troops. So it was mostly those who did not cooperate with the Germans who suffered.

On December 27, 1943, the Decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR followed, and on December 28, the decision of the Council of People's Commissars signed by V. M. Molotov on the liquidation of the Kalmyk ASSR and the eviction of Kalmyks to the Altai and Krasnoyarsk Territories, Omsk and Novosibirsk Regions. This was a punishment for the fact that approximately 3 thousand Kalmyks served in collaborationist formations and fought against Soviet partisans. 101,000 Kalmyks, including more than 4,000 demobilized from the Red Army, began to be deported before the new year, 1944. The operation was completed only in April 1944, when the last one thousand Kalmyks were evicted from the Stalingrad region. From the moment of deportation until April 1946,

14,343 Kalmyks died. The operation to deport the Balkars, one of the two main peoples of the Kabardino-Balkarian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, also accused of collaborating with the Germans (in particular, they helped the German mountain shooters climb Elbrus and continued

partisan struggle against the Soviet troops), began on March 8, 1944 and basically ended on March 11. 37,103 Balkars were deported to Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. During the deportation and in the first months of life in a new place, about 4 thousand people died.

In Chechnya, which was part of the Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, an anti-Soviet partisan movement has existed since the early 1930s. It intensified in the first half of 1941, even before the start of the war, when the NKVD recorded 31 "gang manifestations". In fact, collectivization in Chechnya was only on paper, and a significant part of the local party and Soviet elite, not excluding NKVD officers, turned out to be connected with the rebels and often acted as leaders of partisan detachments. In the spring and summer of 1942, when German troops approached the territory of Chechnya, a powerful anti-Soviet uprising broke out in Vvedensky, Shatoevsky, Itum-Kalinsky and a number of other regions of mountainous Chechnya, which was mostly suppressed only by the autumn of 1943. In March 1942 alone, out of 14,576 Chechen conscripts from the Red Army, 13,560 deserted. The Germans parachuted radio operators to the rebels, as well as instructors from among the Chechens who found themselves on the German side of the front. Among the instructors abandoned by the Germans were also Ingush, Karachai, Dagestanis, Ossetians and Georgians from among emigrants and deserters. There was no serious insurrectionary

movement in Ingushetia, and they were evicted "for company", due to the proximity of language and culture, since in practice it was impossible for Russian-speaking NKVD officers to distinguish between Chechens and Ingush. The troops of the NKVD were brought into Checheno-Ingushetia a month before the start of the deportation under the guise of military exercises and were dressed in the uniform of the Red Army. In total, more than 100 thousand soldiers and operatives of the NKVD and the NKGB participated in the operation. The places of deportation were scheduled for Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. At 5 o'clock in the morning on February 23, the men were called to meetings, where they were told in their native language the decision to deport them. On March 7, the Chechen-Ingush ASSR was abolished. Attempts to escape or resist were suppressed with the use of weapons, up to and including being shot on the spot. In total, 50 people were killed in this way. The high-altitude village of Khaibakh in the Galanzhoi

drifts, which made it impossible to transport its inhabitants in the coming weeks, the NKVD troops massacred about 700 inhabitants. The last train with Chechens and Ingush arrived at the destination station on March 20, 1944. 478,479 people were evicted, including 91,250 Ingush and 387,229 Chechens. Of this number, 2016 people were arrested, mostly Chechens. 239,768 Chechens and 78,470 Ingush arrived in Kazakhstan, 70,097 Chechens and 2,278 Ingush arrived in Kyrgyzstan. On the way and in the first weeks after arriving at the place, about 75 thousand Chechens and 10 thousand Ingush died from malnutrition, cold and epidemics, mainly children and the elderly. The insurgency in Chechnya

continued after the deportation. In 1945, the partisans were still strong enough to defeat an NKVD company of more than 100 men. In 1948, only scattered groups of 3-5 people remained, some of which survived until the 1970s.

After the Caucasian peoples, it was the turn of the peoples of Crimea, which the Red Army liberated in April-May 1944. In total, from 15 to 20 thousand Crimean Tatars volunteers from 218 thousand Tatars who lived in Crimea in 1939 served in the German armed forces, auxiliary police and self-defense units year. They were mainly used to fight partisans. In 1941, about 10 thousand Tatars were drafted into the ranks of the Red Army, most of them remained in the Crimea after its occupation by the Germans and Romanians. In 1941-1944, 1130 Tatars fought in the Crimean partisan detachments (the total number of partisans during this period was about 11 thousand), of which 96 died, 103 went missing and 177 deserted. In the underground organizations of Crimea during the same period, there were less than 100 Tatars people (in total there were about 2,500 Crimean underground workers). It is worth noting that a significant part of the Crimean Tatars (more than 4 thousand people) involved in collaborationism were evacuated along with the retreating German troops. The main operation to deport the Crimean Tatars began

at dawn on 18 May and was largely completed on 20 May. 194,111 Crimean Tatars (more than 47,000 families) were evicted from Crimea. Most of the deportees, 37 thousand families (151,083 people), were settled in

Uzbekistan. The rest were taken to the Urals and the European regions of the RSFSR.

During May-June 1944, 184,940 Greeks, 12,422 Bulgarians, 9,620 Armenians, as well as Germans, Italians and Romanians were also deported from the Crimea. Although the

Tatars had to be provided with food along the way and in the places of settlement, in practice severe hunger reigned among the deportees. Only in Uzbekistan in 1944-1945, about 29 thousand Crimean Tatars died. Mortality was also high among the Crimean Bulgarians, Armenians and Greeks. On June 30, 1945, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR transformed the Crimean ASSR into the Crimean Oblast.

The lend-lease myth

The main myth associated with Lend-Lease and replicated by Soviet propaganda, starting from the first post-war years, is the assertion that the supply of weapons, military equipment, strategic raw materials, industrial equipment and food from the USA, England and Canada to the USSR did not play a significant role in Soviet military efforts and the Red Army could have won without Western help. Lend-lease (from the English lend - "to lend" and lease - "to rent, for rent") is a

government assistance program that the United States during World War II provided to countries whose security was considered vital to American interests. The Lend-Lease Act was passed on March 11, 1941. He allowed to provide "loan" weapons, military equipment, strategic raw materials, fuel and equipment to other countries. At the same time, weapons and military equipment lost during the hostilities, as well as raw materials, materials and equipment used for the needs of the war, were not subject to subsequent payment. In the USSR, lend-lease was called not only aid received from the United States, but also military supplies from England and other countries of the British Empire, primarily Canada. All American lend-lease deliveries amounted to \$50.1 billion, of which British deliveries amounted to \$31.4 billion, and the United States \$11.3 billion, or more than 83% of the total deliveries to the USSR. Canada had an assistance program similar to the American Lend-Lease, under which deliveries to the USSR amounted to 167.3 million Canadian dollars. Reverse lend-lease from the USSR to the United States in the form of the supply of strategic raw materials amounted to \$2.2 billion. The first lend-lease protocol was signed in Moscow on October 1, 1941. Prior to this, military supplies from the United States were paid for in currency and gold. From England during the war years, weapons, military equipment, raw materials and fuel were delivered to the USSR in the amount of 318 million pounds. Art., which amounted to 15% of the total amount of deliveries to the USSR from the USA and the countries of the British Empire. Assistance was also provided through private channels. Thus, in the United States, the "Committee for Relief" was created.

Russians in the War" (Russia War Relief), which donated over \$1.5 billion worth of medicines, medicines and equipment, food and clothing. In England, there was a similar committee headed by Winston Churchill's wife Clementine. True, the amount he collected was much more modest. Lend-lease deliveries, according to the last protocol signed in April 1944, were to end on May 12, 1945. However, in fact, they were extended until the Soviet-Japanese war and finally stopped only on September 20, 1945. Almost half of the deliveries were made through Soviet Pacific ports. Almost a quarter of Lend-Lease deliveries were made by Arctic convoys, and about the same came through Iran. The closest route through the Arctic was also the most dangerous. Here, German submarines sent up to 15% of the cargo to the bottom. Here, 85 out of 1400 merchant ships and 16 British warships were lost, including 2 cruisers and 6 destroyers. The Germans lost up to 30 submarines, the battlecruiser Scharnhorst and a number of other warships. Losses on other routes were negligible. Although Lend-Lease deliveries formally accounted for only 4% of the Soviet GNP, according to Soviet estimates, their importance was critical to the Soviet war economy. After all, not everything was supplied, but only what the USSR experienced the most urgent need for. Thus,

the supply of aviation gasoline under Lend-Lease amounted to 57.8% of its production in the USSR during the war. 265.6 thousand cars were produced in the Soviet Union, and 409.5 thousand cars were received under Lend-Lease. Lend-lease deliveries of railway rails accounted for more than 80% of Soviet production. Under Lend-Lease, 1,900 mainline steam locomotives and 66 diesel-electric locomotives were delivered, and only 800 mainline steam locomotives, one diesel locomotive and 6 electric locomotives were produced in the USSR during the war years. In 1942-1945, a little more than one thousand freight cars were produced in the USSR, and more than 11 thousand were received under Lend-Lease. Western deliveries also accounted for 53% of the total Soviet production of explosives, more than 80% of the total copper production. And 1.25 times more aluminum was supplied under Lend-Lease than was produced by Soviet industry during the Great Patriotic War.

In addition, the USSR received 956.7 thousand miles of field telephone cable, 2.1 thousand miles of sea cable and 1.1 thousand miles of submarine cable, 35,800 radio stations, 5,899 receivers and 348 locators, which provided the basic needs of the Red Army in means of communication. Deliveries of tanks amounted to 12.5 thousand, aircraft - 22.2 thousand, and all of them, unlike the Soviet ones, were equipped with high-quality radio stations. The supply of American industrial equipment also played a significant role. As Marshal Zhukov admitted after the war, "we would be in a difficult position without American gunpowder, we could not produce the amount of ammunition that we needed. Without the American "stude backers" we would have nothing to carry our artillery on. Yes, they largely provided our front-line transport in general. The production of special steels, necessary for various needs of the war, was also associated with a number of American supplies ... Could we quickly start producing tanks if it were not for American steel assistance? And now they present the matter in such a way that we had all this in abundance. It is also worth noting that the active army was largely supplied by American food supplies. If there were no Lend-Lease supplies of raw materials, fuel and industrial equipment, Soviet industry would not be

able to surpass German industry in the production of tanks and aircraft, would not be able to produce the required amount of ammunition and could not defeat the Wehrmacht, and perhaps even could not to withstand the German onslaught.

Myth Rzhev

The main myth of the battles for the Rzhev-Vyazma bridgehead in 1942–1943 lies in the assertion of Soviet and Russian historiography that the battle for Rzhev was not of great importance for the Soviet Headquarters of the Supreme High Command and this direction was secondary, in particular, during the battle for Stalingrad. In fact, the liquidation

of the Rzhev-Vyazemsky bridgehead and the destruction of the main forces of the Army Group Center defending it were among the main goals of the Red Army, and during the Stalingrad counteroffensive, more forces and means were used to attack in the Rzhev region than near Stalingrad.

The important railway junction Rzhev was occupied without a fight by German troops on October 14, 1941. At the beginning of 1942, after the successful counter-offensive of the Red Army near Moscow, Soviet troops approached Rzhev, where there was a strategically important crossing over the Volga. This city, unlike Kalinin, the command of Army Group Center decided to defend to the last. It, being an important railway junction, became one of the main elements of the defense of the Rzhev-Vyazemsky bridgehead, from which the Germans could still threaten Moscow. This bridgehead was defended by the 9th German army of General Walter Model. On January 8, the Rzhev-Vyazemsky offensive operation of the Kalinin and Western fronts began. However, at the end of January, the Germans, having pulled up reserves from Western Europe, launched counterattacks. Part of the Soviet troops was surrounded. In February, the 29th Army was destroyed, and in April, the shock group of the 33rd Army. 5.2 thousand people broke through from the 29th Army. She lost 26,647 killed, 4,888 captured and 187 tanks. Of the 12,000th grouping of the 33rd Army, only 889 people broke through to their own. The fact

that the Germans retained the Rzhev-Vyazemsky bridgehead led the Soviet Headquarters to assume that in 1942 the Wehrmacht would launch a general offensive in the Moscow direction. Thus, the main blow of the Germans in the south was unexpected for her. But also

the German command may have held this bridgehead for too long. It is possible that the best course of action for the German side would be to evacuate the Rzhev-Vyazemsky bridgehead shortly after the start of the offensive towards Stalingrad and the Caucasus. In this case, with the help of the liberated troops, and then at the decisive moment of the start of the Soviet counter-offensive near Stalingrad, highly combat-ready German divisions would have appeared on its flanks, and not much weaker Romanian, Italian and Hungarian ones.

On July 30, 1942, Soviet troops launched the Rzhev-Sychevsk operation. Parts of the 30th Army of the Kalinin Front broke through the German defenses. But to the outskirts of Rzhev, together with the 29th Army, they managed to reach only by the end of August. Meanwhile, the 20th Army of the Western Front broke through the enemy defenses and, advancing more than 30 km, reached the Vazuza and Gzhat rivers. But the 5th Army, advancing on Karmanovo, failed to break through the German defenses. Karmanovo was taken only on 23 August. On this day, the 31st Army liberated Zubtsov. But on September 6-8, the offensive had to be stopped due to the increased resistance of the Germans. Meanwhile, the 30th Army crossed the Volga on August 29 and a bridgehead was created on its right bank. Rzhev was subjected to intense shelling and bombardment. On September 21, assault groups broke into the northern outskirts of Rzhev. But on September 27, German reserves drove them out of Rzhev. Ilya Ehrenburg recalled this battle: "Maybe there were offensives that cost more human lives, but it seems that there was no other so sad - for weeks there were battles for five or six broken trees, for the wall of a broken house and a tiny hillock ... Ours occupied the airfield, and the military town was in the hands of the Germans ... At the headquarters there were maps with the squares of the city, but sometimes there was no trace of the streets ... "Although the Soviet troops failed to complete their tasks, during the offensive they fettered the main forces of Army Group Center and did not allowed the Germans to transfer additional forces to the Caucasus and near

Stalingrad, where the fate of the campaign was decided. On November 25, 1942, Operation Mars began, carried out by the Western Front of General Maxim Purkaev and the Kalinin Front of General Ivan Konev. Their

Georgy Zhukov. It was supposed, in case of success, to defeat and destroy the army of the Model, then to defeat the other troops of the Army Group Center, liberate Belarus and reach the Baltic Sea and the approaches to East Prussia. Simultaneously with the "Mars" on the right wing of the Kalinin Front, the Velikolukskaya operation was carried out - the offensive of the 3rd shock army on Velikie Luki and Nevel in order to cut the Leningrad-Vitebsk railway in the Novosokolniki region. For the operation "Mars" Zhukov attracted 668 thousand people and about 2000 tanks. In reserve for the further development of the offensive were 415 thousand people and 1265 tanks. There were more people and equipment than were used in the counteroffensive near Stalingrad, including during its development on the southern wing of the Soviet-German front.

The offensive was unexpected for the Germans. On the day it began, Model was just carrying out a castling of two divisions, which weakened the German defense. From the west, the 41st Army of the Kalinin Front, reinforced by the 1st Mechanized Corps, dealt the main blow. To the north, the 22nd Army of the same front with the 3rd Mechanized Corps and the 39th Army advanced. From the east, the main blow was delivered by the 20th Army of the Western Front, reinforced by the 6th Tank Corps and the 2nd Guards Cavalry Corps. To the north, the 31st Army of the Western Front was advancing.

On the first day of the offensive, the 41st Army was successful. Advancing on an eight-kilometer front, she advanced 6 km. For 6 days of fighting, the army made its way to a depth of 20-25 km, but then was forced to go on the defensive.

The Germans with two tank divisions hit the right flank of the 41st Army and cut off parts of the 1st Mechanized Corps and the 6th Rifle Corps, which were forced to fight surrounded for more than two weeks. Only by December 16, the remnants of the two corps were able to break through to their own, losing two-thirds of the personnel, all tanks and heavy weapons. The 22nd Army also failed. The

3rd mechanized corps managed to penetrate 18 km in 10 days of fighting, but suffered heavy losses and went on the defensive. On the Western Front, the 31st Army was not able to break through the German defenses at all, and the 20th Army advanced only 6 km, and even then the front reserves had to be used for this. The equestrian mechanized group was ordered already on the night of November 26

cross to the western bank of the Vazuza River. It was planned that on the first day, Soviet troops would break through the defenses and advance 20 km. However, the Germans resisted, leaving the trenches for the duration of the artillery preparation and re-occupying them with the start of the attack. The bridgehead turned out to be packed with the rear of rifle divisions and a cavalry-mechanized group. They were bombed with impunity by the Luftwaffe.

Due to the failure of the first stage, the offensive of the 5th and 33rd armies of the Western Front, planned for December 1, was canceled, which were supposed to eliminate the Gzhatskaya enemy grouping as part of Operation Jupiter, and then liberate Smolensk.

According to Zhukov, "the German command, contrary to our calculations, significantly strengthened its troops here, transferring them from other fronts." In fact, Army Group Center was able to manage on its own. The Soviet strike groups, which were surrounded, went out to their own in early January 1943, having lost all their armored vehicles. The plan to defeat Army Group Center failed. During Operation Mars,

Soviet troops lost about 0.5 million killed, wounded and captured, and about 1850 tanks and 127 aircraft. According to official Soviet data, losses during Operation Mars amounted to 215,674 people, including 70,373 irretrievable losses. However, considering that irretrievable losses in Soviet sources were underestimated by about a third, the total losses can be estimated at 456 thousand people, which approximately coincides with the German estimate of Soviet losses during Operation Mars at 0.5 million people. About 5 thousand Red Army soldiers were taken prisoner. The Germans lost about 40 thousand killed, wounded and missing and about 400 tanks and self-propelled guns. At the same time, the objective significance of Operation Mars was that the Soviet offensive pinned down the troops of the Army Group Center and did not allow the German command to withdraw troops from its front in order to strengthen the group that was trying to unblock the 6th Army in Stalingrad. One of the reasons for the failure of Operation Mars was that the efforts of the Soviet armies were dispersed. The Germans, on the contrary, having concentrated their limited forces on the defense of the most important points, were able not only to repel the offensive, but also to surround the main Soviet groupings.

In February - March 1943, the German 9th Model Army left the Rzhev-Vyazma ledge, since the German command decided to concentrate all forces to eliminate the ledge in the Kursk region. A planned withdrawal to previously prepared positions was successfully carried out. At the same time, the population and food supplies were evacuated, and infrastructure was destroyed. Until the very last moment, the Soviet troops did not notice that there was no enemy in front of them. Before leaving Rzhev, the Germans blew up the bridge across the Volga. On March 2, the Soviet troops began the pursuit and on March 31 they reached the new German defensive lines. The battle for Rzhev is over. According to some estimates, in the battles near Rzhev and Vyazma, Soviet losses in killed and captured alone exceeded 1.5 million people. German losses were several times less, but their exact value is unknown.

The myth of the Crimean catastrophe in May 1942

of the year

The myth of the defeat on the Kerch Peninsula, which the troops of the Crimean Front suffered in May 1942, boils down to the fact that the main culprit for the defeat was the representative of the Headquarters, the head of the Main Political Directorate L.3. Mehlis, who subjugated the command of the front, but could not repel the German offensive. To alleviate the situation of the besieged Sevastopol, on December 26, 1941, the Soviet command landed troops in Kerch. By that time there was only one German infantry division and two Romanian infantry brigades. The commander of the Transcaucasian Front, General Dmitry Kozlov, proposed to simultaneously land troops in the Kerch region and in the port of Feodosia in order to surround and destroy the enemy's Kerch grouping. Then the Soviet troops were supposed to release the blockade of Sevastopol and completely liberate the Crimea. The main blow was inflicted in the area of Feodosia by the 44th army of General Alexei Pervushin, the auxiliary - the 51st army of General Vladimir Lvov in the Kerch region. They numbered 82,500 men, 43 tanks, 198 guns and 256 mortars. Three more rifle and one cavalry divisions were in reserve on Taman. For the landing, 78 warships and 170 transport ships were used, including 2 cruisers, 6 destroyers, 52 patrol and torpedo boats from the Black Sea Fleet of Admiral Philip Oktyabrsky and the Azov Flotilla of Admiral Sergei Gorshkov. The actions of the paratroopers were supported by more than 700 combat aircraft. On December 26, the landing force landed near Kerch, and on December 30 - in the port of

Feodosia. In the first wave of landing there were more than 40 thousand people. In Feodosia, paratroopers landed right in the port and drove a small German garrison out of the city. In Kerch, they had to land on an unequipped coast. The paratroopers walked chest-deep in icy water under fire from German batteries and suffered heavy losses. But a few days later frost hit, and the main forces of the 51st Army were able to cross the ice of the Kerch Strait. December 29th

the commander of the 42nd Army Corps, General Count Hans von Sponeck, fearing encirclement, ordered the German-Romanian troops to withdraw to the Parchap positions. The order was immediately canceled by Manstein, but the radio station of the corps headquarters moved to a new location and could not accept the new order. On the Kerch Peninsula, the 46th Infantry Division abandoned its heavy weapons, and its commander, General Kurt Gimmer, was killed. Sponeck was put on trial and sentenced to death, replaced by 6 years imprisonment in a fortress. After the assassination attempt on Hitler on July 20, 1944, Sponeck was accused of participating in a conspiracy and executed. Since the Soviet troops

advanced too slowly, the German-Romanian units managed to create a barrier at the turn of the Yaila spurs - the Sivash coast west of Ak-Monai. Due to the narrowness of the front, the attackers could not make full use of their overwhelming numerical superiority. There was not a single hospital on the bridgehead. Many of the wounded died without waiting for help during transportation to Taman. Therefore, losses, especially irretrievable ones, during the landing were especially great: more than 40 thousand people, of which about 32 thousand were killed, frozen and missing, as well as 35 tanks and 133 guns and mortars. The paratroopers did not have anti-aircraft guns either, which made them defenseless against the Luftwaffe. On January 4, German bombers sank five transports and heavily damaged the Krasny Kavkaz cruiser. This made it difficult to deliver ammunition and other supplies to the bridgehead.

On January 5, 1942, the Black Sea Fleet also made an amphibious landing in the port of Evpatoria with the forces of a marine battalion, but it was completely destroyed. On

January 15, the Germans, having transferred part of the troops from Sevastopol, launched a counteroffensive, striking at the junction of the 44th and 51st armies in the Vladislavovka area. On this day, the headquarters of the 44th Army was destroyed by an air raid and the commander was seriously wounded. On January 18, the Germans recaptured Feodosia. The troops of the Caucasian Front withdrew beyond the Akmanai Isthmus. On January 28, the Crimean Front was formed under the command of General Kozlov. In early February, the front was reinforced by the 47th Army of General Konstantin Kalganov. On February 27, Soviet troops launched an offensive on the Kerch Peninsula. The Primorsky Army struck a blow towards them, which, however, failed to break

siege ring. Army commissar 1st rank Lev Mekhlis was appointed representative of the Headquarters on the Crimean Front. However, the offensive did not bring success and on March 19 it was stopped. On April 9, the Crimean Front launched its last offensive with the participation of 160 tanks, which was stopped two days later.

On May 8, the German counter-offensive began, which received the code name "Hunting for bustards." It was carried out by five German infantry and one tank divisions, as well as two Romanian infantry divisions and one Romanian cavalry brigade. Manstein expected to destroy the main forces of the defenders during the breakthrough, in order to prevent them from using their numerical superiority. The main Soviet headquarters were put out of action by powerful air raids. So, on May 9, the command post of the 51st Army was destroyed. General Lvov was killed. The main blow was inflicted in the south, and a detour was made in the north. At the headquarters of the Crimean Front, the German offensive came as a complete surprise. On May 8, Mekhlis complained to Stalin about Kozlov, who allegedly did not listen to his warnings about the upcoming German offensive. Stalin did not like this attempt to absolve himself of responsibility, and on May 9, without hiding his irritation, he telegraphed Mekhlis: "You hold on to the strange position of an outside observer who is not responsible for the affairs of the Crimean Front. This position is very convenient, but it is rotten through and through. On the Crimean front, you are not an outside observer, but a responsible representative of the Headquarters, responsible for all the successes and failures of the front and obliged to correct the mistakes of the command on the spot. You, together with the command, are responsible for the fact that the left flank of the front turned out to be extremely weak. If "the whole situation showed that the enemy would attack in the morning," and you did not take all measures to organize a rebuff, limiting yourself to passive criticism, then so much the worse for you. So, you still have not understood that you were sent to the Crimean Front not as a State Control, but as a responsible representative of the Stavka. You are demanding that we replace Kozlov with someone like Hindenburg. But you can't help but know that we don't have Hindenburg."

The main forces of the Crimean Front retreated in disorder to Kerch and on May 18 ceased resistance.

The total losses of Soviet troops in May 1942 on the Kerch Peninsula amounted to more than 300 thousand people, including 170 thousand.

prisoners, as well as 258 tanks, 417 aircraft and 1133 guns. Until May 20, 116,500 servicemen, including the wounded, were evacuated to the Taman Peninsula, as well as 25 guns, 27 mortars and 47 PC installations. The losses of the 11th German-Romanian army did not exceed 10 thousand people.

The main culprit for the defeat on the Kerch Peninsula, Stalin declared the representative of the Headquarters Mekhlis, the commander of the Crimean Front Kozlov and his chief of staff, General Pyotr Vechny. They were demoted in ranks and positions. On June 4, 1942, the Stavka directive stated that they, as well as the army commanders, "revealed a complete misunderstanding of the nature of modern warfare" and "tried to repel the attacks of enemy strike groups, saturated with tanks and supported by strong aircraft, by linear defense construction - compaction of the first line troops at the expense of reducing the depth of the battle formations of defense. Mekhlis and the leadership of the Crimean Front were accused of inability to ensure the camouflage of command posts and organize reliable communication and interaction of troops, as well as that they were two days late with the withdrawal of troops. However, these shortcomings were characteristic of almost all Soviet commanders of fronts and armies, and by no means only Mekhlis and Kozlov. More than 20 years after the Kerch events, General Kozlov also ranked the commander of the Black Sea Fleet, Admiral F. S. Oktyabrsky, among the perpetrators of the disaster. Indeed, Philip Sergeevich, having dominance at sea and significant aviation forces, was unable to organize the evacuation of the troops of the Crimean Front through the narrow Kerch Strait. There is also no doubt the fault of Kozlov, Vechny and Mekhlis, who failed to organize defense on a narrow front against the enemy, who was significantly inferior to the Crimean Front in terms of people and equipment and provided at least equality of forces in aviation. However, the main reasons for the defeat of the Red Army in the Crimea were of a systemic nature and were caused by the general vices of the Soviet Armed Forces. The Crimean Front was opposed by one of the best commanders of the Wehrmacht, who managed to impose on the enemy a maneuvering struggle for which he was not prepared, and fully used the dominance of the Luftwaffe in the air. The leaders of the Crimean Front were preparing for the offensive, not paying due attention to

defense attention. But about the same were the reasons for the loss by the Red Army and a number of other battles, in particular Vyazemsky.

The myth of the Kharkov disaster in May 1942

The main myth of the disaster that befell the troops of the Southwestern Front in May 1942 was that the Soviet offensive pursued only the limited goal of liberating Kharkov. In

fact, the operation to liberate Kharkov, if successful, was supposed to be the beginning of the general offensive of the Red Army to liberate Ukraine. On May 12, 1942, the troops of the

Southwestern Front launched an offensive against Kharkov from the Barvenkovo bridgehead beyond the Seversky Donets. The German command planned to launch an offensive on the Barvenkovo bridgehead on May 18, but the Soviet troops preempted the enemy. This operation was conceived by the Commander-in-Chief of the South-Western Direction, Marshal Timoshenko. The weaker Southern Front was supposed to provide the strike force from the south. If the offensive was successful, it was supposed to first encircle and destroy the 6th German Army, and then liberate the Left-Bank Ukraine from the Germans and reach the Dnieper, destroying the main forces of Army Group South in a giant "cauldron" near the Sea of \u200b\u200bAzov. It was supposed to advance on Zaporozhye, go to the rear of the Donbass-Taganrog enemy grouping, press it against the Sea of Azov and destroy it. The southwestern front was supposed to reach the middle reaches of the Dnieper, and the southern front to the

lower reaches of the Southern Bug. Nikita Khrushchev, a member of the Military Council of the Southwestern Front and direction, recalled: "The following plan was outlined: to deliver the main blow to the enemy in the spring on the arc that we created south of Kharkov, and an auxiliary blow with smaller forces north of Kharkov, and thus, taking Kharkov in pincers, release it. When we planned, we were sure that we would succeed in this operation, that we would solve the problem and open the spring-summer hostilities with such a spectacular result as the liberation of the largest industrial and political center of Ukraine."

The offensive did not come as a surprise to the Germans. The main defensive line of the Germans near Kharkov had a depth of up to

20 km. It was based on strongholds and centers of resistance created around settlements. The second defensive line was built 10-15 km from the front line, the rear - 20-25 km from the front. Nevertheless, at first the

offensive developed successfully. From the south, the 6th army of General Avksenty Gorodnyansky delivered the main blow. The army group of General Leonid Bobkin attacked Krasnograd, providing the 6th Army from the southwest. The 57th Army of General Kuzma Podlas and the 9th Army of General Mikhail Kharitonov from the Southern Front were supposed to defend the Barvenkovo bridgehead from the south in order to provide the shock group of the Southwestern Front from the south.

Parts of Gorodnyansky's army broke through to Chuguev and Merefa. In the north, the 28th Army of Dmitry Ryabyshev and the 38th Army of General Kirill Moskalenko were able to advance 65 km in the Volchansk region, but could not connect with the southern group and close the encirclement. The 21st army of General Vasily Gordov, operating in the north, got involved in the struggle for individual German strongholds and hardly advanced. Nevertheless, the first defensive line was broken through. The 28th Army advanced 6-8 km and reached the rear line of the German defense. However, the command of the Southwestern Front did not dare to introduce tank formations into the breakthrough. It also miscalculated the time when the German operational reserves might come up. Timoshenko believed that this would take 5-6 days, when in fact they began to approach the battlefield on the second day of the Soviet offensive. Near

Kharkov, 430 German tanks and assault guns were opposed by 1,100 Soviet tanks, and only 12 modified German T-IV tanks with a long-barreled 75-mm gun could fight on equal terms with the I-34.

As early as May 15, Timoshenko and Khrushchev were optimistic about the prospects for an offensive. The report they sent to Headquarters that day stated: "It is now completely clear to us that the enemy, having concentrated two full-blooded tank divisions in Kharkov, was probably preparing for an offensive in the direction of Kupyansk and that we managed to disrupt this offensive in the process of its preparation. . It is also obvious that now the enemy in the Kharkov area is not

has such forces to launch a counter offensive against us ... "South of Kharkov, Timoshenko

decided to bring two tank corps into battle on the morning of May 16. Bobkin's group was supposed to take Krasnograd with the forces of the 6th Cavalry Corps. However, by the appointed time, the tank corps did not have time to approach the front line. The Germans, on May 16, completed the regrouping and prepared for the offensive. At the same time, they put in order the detached units and destroyed all the bridges across the Berestovaya River, which, under the conditions of the spring flood, turned into a serious anti-tank obstacle. Nevertheless, by the end of May 16, Soviet troops crossed Berestovaya. But in order to bring tank corps into the breach on the morning of May 17, it was necessary to restore the bridges. Bobkin's cavalry failed to capture Krasnograd.

In general, by the end of May 16, Soviet troops advanced 20-35 km and fought on the lines, which were planned to be reached already on the 3rd day of the operation. The tank corps in the northern sector were already being drawn into defensive battles, while those in the southern sector were only getting ready to enter the breach. In the south, it was necessary to break through the rear defensive line of the 6th German army along the Berestovaya River.

But on May 17, the German 1st Panzer Army of General Ewald Kleist and the 17th Army of General Hermann Goth, as part of Operation Fredericus I, launched an attack on the Barvenkovo bridgehead from the south, broke through the weak front of the 9th Army and went to the rear of both shock groups. The idea of the operation was to encircle and destroy the Soviet troops on the Barvenkovsky ledge and seize a bridgehead in the Izyum area, which later was to become the starting line for a future general offensive. This blow came as a complete surprise to both the command of the southwestern direction and the Headquarters. The situation was aggravated by the fact that the troops of the left flank of the 9th Army and the front reserve on the morning of May 17 were in the process of regrouping. Part of the troops moved to new areas of concentration, and they did not have reliable communications with the headquarters of the army and the front.

On the very first day, the 9th Army command post was disabled by air raids, through which the main communication lines of the 57th Army also passed. The front of the 9th Army was broken through. The headquarters of the Southern Front learned about the enemy offensive that had begun only in the afternoon, when the breakthrough had already been made, and the headquarters of the southwestern direction only by the end of the day. On May 17, on the front of the 6th Soviet Army, two tank corps were introduced into the breakthrough, which advanced 15 km. The Kharkov-Krasnograd railway was cut. However, due to a lack of ammunition, the cavalry corps was unable to capture Krasnograd. On May 18, the Kleist group, developing the offensive, occupied the southern part of Izyum and destroyed the 12th tank brigade. Turning from Izyum to the west, the enemy cut off units of the 5th Cavalry Corps and two rifle divisions from the crossings. Soviet aviation had to be urgently relocated from the airfields in Izyum and Petrovskaya, which were under the threat of capture, so that she could not support her troops. On May 18, Vasilevsky, Deputy Chief of the General Staff, proposed stopping the advance on Kharkov and throwing in the main forces of strike groups to eliminate a breakthrough in the south, but Timoshenko convinced Stalin that the threat from the Kramatorsk group was exaggerated. On this day, the 6th Cavalry Corps completely surrounded Krasnograd. Only in the second half of May 19, Timoshenko decided to suspend the offensive of the 6th Army, gain a foothold on the achieved lines and defeat the Kleist army group with a joint attack of the 6th, 57th and 9th armies. At the same time, the 38th Army was to defeat the Chuguev group of Germans. However, the organization of the counterattack dragged on. And on May 22, two tank divisions of the 6th German Army crossed the Seversky Donets and moved towards the Kleist group. On this day, Soviet troops on the Barvenkovsky ledge were surrounded. 20 infantry, 7 cavalry divisions and 14 tank brigades ended up in the "cauldron". Only 22 thousand people managed to escape from the encirclement in several groups. By May 30, the main forces of the 6th, 9th, 57th armies and the task force of General Leonid Bobkin were destroyed. 239 thousand soldiers and commanders were taken prisoner. 2026 guns, 1249 tanks and 540 aircraft were lost. Generals Kostenko, Bobkin, Gorodnyansky and Podlas perished in the encirclement. The Germans lost no more than 20,000 men.

people killed, wounded and missing. The success of the German troops was ensured by their advantage in maneuverability and means of control, better interaction between the combat arms, and better combat training of the troops.

Major Reichel's myth

The main myth associated with the case of Major Reichel is that due to the fact that the plans he had for the German offensive in the south of the Eastern Front fell into the hands of the Soviet command in the summer of 1942, this plan, known as the plan of operation "Blau" and providing for the capture Stalingrad and the Caucasus, failed.

According to the Blau plan, in the summer-autumn campaign of 1942 on the Soviet-German front, Hitler sought to achieve two strategic goals - to capture the lower reaches of the Volga and the Caucasus. Thus, he hoped to deprive the Soviet Union of the main sources of oil and cut off the connection of the central regions with Central Asia and Iran, from where, in particular, Lend-Lease deliveries were made. According to this plan, shortly after the start of the offensive, Army Group A (commanded by Field Marshal List) as part of the 17th and 1st German tank armies was to advance on Rostov and further to the North Caucasus, with its ultimate goal of capturing Transcaucasia and, first of all, the oil fields of Baku. Army Group "B" (commander Field Marshal von Bock), as part of the 6th and 4th German tank armies, was to advance towards Stalingrad and further to Astrakhan.

The 2nd German Army from Group B, with the assistance of the 4th Panzer Army and the 2nd Hungarian Army, was to capture the right-bank part of Voronezh, put up a barrier along the Don and secure the left flank of the group advancing on Stalingrad. Army Group B also included the 8th Italian and 3rd and 4th Romanian armies. However, 9 days before the

start of the German offensive, an incident occurred that put it in jeopardy. On June 19, Major Joachim Reichel, head of the operations department of the headquarters of the 23rd Panzer Division, took off in a light aircraft for units. In violation of all the rules, he took with him plans for the upcoming offensive. The plane was shot down, and the documents fell into the hands of Soviet soldiers. The former chief of staff of the Bryansk Front, General M. I. Kazakov, recalled: "On June 19, on the Southwestern Front, in the Nezhegol region, a German military

airplane. Everyone who was in it died, but in the tablet of one of the dead, a map of 1:100,000 and some other documents were preserved. Upon careful examination, it was possible to establish that the tablet belonged to Major Reichel, head of the operations department of the 23rd Panzer Division, and that this same Reichel delivered to his headquarters a directive from the commander of the 40th Panzer Corps of the 6th German Army about the upcoming offensive operation "Blau".

The task of the 40th Panzer Corps was described in particular detail in the directive, which included two tank divisions (3rd and 23rd), one motorized (29th) and two infantry (100th and 376th). At the first stage of the operation, the corps was supposed to advance with part of its forces from the Volchansk region in the general direction of Volokonovka, Sary Oskol, in order to connect with the troops of the 4th German tank army advancing from the Shchigry region at Sary Oskol and close the encirclement ring of a significant grouping of Soviet troops. In the future, these parts of the enemy became the vanguard of his 6th field and 4th tank armies, which were to conduct an offensive: further along the Don River to the southeast. However, he also admits that "despite the great intensity of the work of all types of our reconnaissance, both aviation and ground, we were not able to determine with sufficient accuracy the composition of the enemy's forces. We only knew the total number of his divisions intended for the offensive in the first echelon (with an error of two or three units), but did not have data on tank and motorized formations. Undoubtedly, the documents and maps captured from Major Reichel did not disclose the entire grouping of German troops, the entire plan of Operation Blau.

On the evening of June 20, a conversation took place over a direct wire between the commander-in-chief of the Southwestern Front and the direction of Tymoshenko and Stalin: "Tymoshenko reported: "The intercepted documents with the planned actions of the enemy are beyond doubt, because they were sent by a combat aircraft, on which there were officers.

The plane, due to bad weather, lost its orientation and fell into the sphere of our military anti-aircraft artillery, which was shot down. Two officers, including the pilot, burned down during the fall, and one officer with the rank of major remained alive, tried to destroy the documents, but was reached by our troops at the moment of falling to the ground and killed in

shootout. In addition to the documents handed over to you, many others have been captured and are being deciphered. Among them, one document has already been deciphered, which indicates that this offensive has been postponed until 23.06 (the German offensive began on June 28, and on June 23 it was planned to complete the last regroupings according to the Blaeu plan. On June 19, the exact day of the start of the offensive has not yet been established. This erroneous the interpretation cost the Soviet command dearly. —**B.S.**) It is possible that the enemy will find out that the plane was shot down in the location of our troops, and will be able to make some changes or postpone in time. We think that there will be no fundamental change, since the enemy groupings, apparently, are already mainly concentrated and the direction chosen by him for the strike until today has been advantageous in terms of our measures. Prior to receiving this directive, we had planned the following solution:

1. To withdraw two more rifle divisions to the front of SURKOVO, NESTERNOE and place them on the defensive, having two rifle divisions in the first echelon and one in the second echelon. We take these two rifle divisions from Ryabyshev (commander of the 28th Army. - **B.S.**), who still has five rifle divisions.

2. The 13th Panzer Corps was supposed to be brought to the same front for the

- infantry. 3. We ask, in addition to the decision of the Headquarters of the Supreme High Command to approve the decision we have outlined.

4. It is somewhat unclear to us what the Headquarters is doing to ensure our junction with Golikov (commander of the Bryansk Front. - **B.S.**), since the enemy is plotting the main blow there. 5. Today, by the end of the day,

- our aviation detected a large grouping of tanks and motorized infantry south of IZYUM, and to this place in the afternoon, the movement of tanks and vehicles from BARVENKOVO was detected. 6. According to our assessment, the enemy's

- plan boils down to the following - the enemy seeks to defeat our flank armies, and then create (obviously a threat - **B.S.**) our troops from the VALUIKI - KUPYANSK front.

7. In connection with this and the decision of the Headquarters to strengthen the left flank, we consider it expedient to leave the 1st Fighter Division

to ensure the Kupyansko-Izyum direction". Stalin

demand: 1. Try to

keep it a secret that we managed to intercept the order. 2. It is possible

that the intercepted order reveals only one corner of the enemy's operational plan. It can be assumed that there are similar plans on other fronts. We think that the Germans will try to throw something away on the day of the anniversary of the war and time their operations to this date. 3. Headquarters approves your decision to

withdraw two divisions to the area indicated by you, as well as to concentrate the 13th Panzer Corps in the same area.

4. The fighter division must be left in its place current location.

5. Concerning the junction of your front with the Bryansk Front Headquarters takes action, which will be announced later.

6. It is very important that the enemy does not warn us with massive air strikes. That is why we deem it necessary that you begin processing the enemy concentration area with our air strikes as soon as possible. It is necessary to kill from the air the enemy's manpower, tanks, communications centers, aviation at airfields before the enemy launches strikes against our troops. To do this, they send you comrade. Vorozheikin. We are also thinking of sending you Com. Vasilevsky".

Stalin seemed to be inclined to think that Reichel's documents were genuine. However, he believed that the attack in the southwest direction was just one of many attacks that the Germans were going to make on the first anniversary of the war, and he was much more worried about the Moscow direction, where he thought the Germans would strike the main blow. To convince the Soviet command of this, the Germans carried out a series of disinformation measures under the conditional name "Kremlin". And on June 27, on the very eve of the German offensive, at the headquarters of the Bryansk Front, according to M.I. that the Russians have Reichel's documents.

The German command did not change the Blau plan, since the regrouping would require several weeks. On June 28, 1942, the 2nd and 4th German tank armies launched an offensive in the Voronezh direction against the Bryansk Front. On June 30, the German 6th Army went on the offensive.

Myth of Order No. 227

The main myth associated with Stalin's famous Order No. 227 is that this order itself turned the tide of the war in favor of the Red Army.

The famous Order of the People's Commissar of Defense No. 227 was issued by Stalin on July 28, 1942, after the Soviet troops left Rostov-on-Don and Novocherkassk without serious resistance. The order stated: "The enemy is throwing more and more new forces to the front and, regardless of the heavy losses for him, climbs forward, breaks into the depths of the Soviet Union, captures new areas, devastates and devastates our cities and villages, rapes, robs and kills the Soviet population. The fighting is going on in the Voronezh region, on the Don, in the south at the gates of the North Caucasus. The German invaders are rushing towards Stalingrad, towards the Volga and want to seize the Kuban, the North Caucasus with their oil and grain wealth at any cost. The enemy has already captured Voroshilovgrad, Starobelsk, Rossosh, Kupyansk, Valuiki, Novocherkassk, Rostov-on-Don, half of Voronezh. Part of the troops of the Southern Front, following the alarmists, left Rostov and Novocherkassk without serious resistance and without an order from Moscow, covering their banners with disgrace. The population of our country, with love and respect for the Red Army, begins to become disillusioned with it, lose faith in the Red Army, and many of them curse the Red Army because it gives our people under the yoke of German oppressors, and itself flows away to the east". At the same time, it was emphasized: "Not a step back! This should be our main call now." Stalin demanded "to root out the talk that we have the opportunity to retreat endlessly, that we have a lot of territory, our country is great and rich, there is a lot of population, there will always be an abundance of bread. Such conversations are false and harmful, they weaken us and strengthen the enemy, because if we do not stop retreating, we will be left without bread, without fuel, without metal, without raw materials, without factories and factories, without railways. This order introduced barrage detachments. There should have been 3–5 such detachments of 200 fighters in each army. Barrage detachments were sup

rear of "unstable divisions" and "to oblige them, in case of panic and disorderly withdrawal of parts of the division, to shoot alarmists and cowards on the spot and thereby help honest fighters of the divisions to fulfill their duty to the Motherland." Also, from those guilty of cowardice or violation of discipline, penal battalions for commanders and commissars of 800 people in the amount of 1-2 to the front were now formed, and 5-10 penal companies of 150-200 people in each army, intended for the guilty ordinary Red Army soldiers and junior command staff. The stay in the penal battalion and the penal company did not exceed three months, after which the penal soldiers were restored to their previous ranks and returned to their units as redeemed. Also, all the wounded or killed were considered redeemed. It is characteristic that the total number of penal companies and penal battalions on each front was approximately the same, although the number of ordinary soldiers was 10-15 times higher than the number of commanders. The thing was that the Red Army soldiers were most often simply shot for the offense for which the officers were sent to the penal battalion. The officers, in the event that they atone for their guilt with blood, were expected to still be used in their previous positions.

The meaning of Order No. 227 was twofold. On the one hand, he strengthened the stamina of the troops, reduced the number of cases when they retreated without orders. On the other hand, the commanders, fearing to give the order to withdraw without a sanction from above, were often late with the withdrawal, and the troops were surrounded. Stalin hoped that under the threat of executions and penal battalions, the Red Army would fight harder and inflict more damage on the enemy. In fact, sometimes it was the other way around. Fearing reprisals, commanders of all levels were sometimes late with their retreat, and this only led to additional losses. So, shortly after the issuance of Order No. 227, the Soviet bridgehead on the western bank of the Don near Kalach was belatedly evacuated, where German tank wedges closed on August 8. As a result, the Germans defeated nine Soviet rifle divisions, two mechanized and seven tank brigades. Up to 57 thousand people were taken prisoner, about one thousand tanks and 650 aircraft were destroyed, 750 guns were captured.

The resilience of the Soviet troops was due, as a rule, not to draconian measures of command, but to the presence of such objective

factors such as the presence of favorable natural boundaries and a sufficient amount of weapons and military equipment, as well as ammunition. Influenced the number of prisoners and the power of the German troops in the East. A turning point in the number of prisoners occurred after the Soviet victory at Stalingrad. After him, the German army was significantly weakened, and its allies dropped out of the fight for a long time. The ratio of both the number of troops and the number of weapons and military equipment became more favorable for the Red Army than in 1941-1942. As a result, in 1943 the Germans were able to carry out only two large but limited offensives in the Kharkov region and on the Kursk Bulge, the latter ending in failure. Under these conditions, the number of Soviet prisoners of war naturally decreased by a factor of three compared to 1942, but this was hardly due to the operation of Order No. 227.

The myth of the defense of Stalingrad

The main myth of the defense of Stalingrad lies in the assertion that Stalingrad from the very beginning was one of the two main targets of the German offensive in the south in the summer of 1942, carried out according to the "Blau" plan. Another important myth is the widespread belief that during the defensive battle for Stalingrad, the losses of the Soviet troops were significantly lower than the losses of the German troops. In the Blue plan, Caucasian oil was indicated as the main goal. The attack on Stalingrad was undertaken

in order to cover the northeastern flank of the troops advancing into the Caucasus. Hitler's directive of April 5, 1942, stated that the offensive "should be carried out in such a way that the forces advancing down the Don would unite in the Stalingrad region with those forces advancing from the Taganrog, Artemovsk region between the lower reaches of the Don and Voroshilovgrad through Seversky Donets to the east. And in conclusion, the latter should connect with the tank army advancing on Stalingrad. If in the course of these operations, especially due to the capture of intact bridges, it is possible to form bridgeheads east and south of the Don, then such cases must be seized. In any case, one should try to reach Stalingrad itself, or at least wrest it from the number of industrial centers and communication centers, exposing it to the action of our heavy weapons. Here, even the occupation of Stalingrad itself was considered optional, since it was possible to put it out of action as a transport hub and center of the military industry with the help of bombardments. Both Voronezh and Stalingrad were only auxiliary directions of the offensive, providing a march to the Caucasus. Voronezh was not even supposed to be completely occupied, limiting itself to the right-bank part of the city in order to hide behind the Don from possible Soviet

attacks.

In development of the directive of April 5, the Blau plan was drawn up, according to which the northern grouping of German troops in the south (Army Group B) was to move from the Kursk-Kharkov region to the middle reaches of the Don to the southeast, while the southern grouping (Army Group A) should have moved quickly southward from the Taganrog region. They were supposed to connect west of Stalingrad, surrounding and destroying the main forces of the Soviet troops between the Seversky Donets and the Don. This was to be followed by an attack on the Caucasus. Initially, it was assumed that

the 6th and 4th tank armies would first attack Stalingrad together, and only after its capture should an attack on Rostov-on-Don be followed with a further breakthrough to the Caucasus. However, Hitler, contrary to the advice of Halder, immediately sent the 4th Panzer Army south to Rostov, and even reinforced it with the 40th Panzer Corps, taken from the 6th Army of General Friedrich Paulus. As a result, the latter was unable to capture Stalingrad on the move. It was not possible to destroy the Soviet troops in the interfluvium of the Don and the Seversky Donets, since the Soviet command sought to avoid encirclement and in a number of cases managed to quickly withdraw its troops, a significant part of which retreated precisely to Stalingrad, where Soviet reserves were also advanced. The German command could not ignore such a grouping of Soviet troops.

By a directive of 23 July 1942, Hitler authorized the conduct of Operation Braunschweig. Now Army Group A was to destroy the Soviet troops that had retreated beyond the Don to the south and southeast of Rostov, and then to seize the Caucasus. Army Group "B" was supposed to defeat the Soviet troops in the Stalingrad area and capture the city. There was a large gap between the two army groups, covered only by weak Romanian troops.

On August 9, 1942, the Stavka subordinated the Stalingrad Front and the Volga military flotilla to the command of the South Eastern Front. General Andrey Eremenko was appointed to command the South-Eastern Front.

August 23 was the most brutal raid of the 4th air fleet of General Baron Wolfram von Richthofen on Stalingrad. The wooden suburbs of Stalingrad burned down almost completely.

Many high-rise buildings were destroyed. Incendiary bombs set fire to fuel tanks on the banks of the Volga, and all of Stalingrad was shrouded in black smoke. The Luftwaffe made about 1,500 sorties, dropped one thousand tons of bombs and lost only two aircraft. In Stalingrad, during this and several subsequent raids, about 40 thousand civilians were killed. The main factories and communications were put out of action. On August 23, the German 14th Panzer Corps broke

through to the Vertyachey area and, cutting the Stalingrad defense into two parts, went to the Market area. At 04:00 on August 25, the tank regiment of the 16th Panzer Division reached the Volga. The 62nd Army was cut off from the main forces of the Stalingrad Front, so it was transferred to the South-Eastern Front. On the morning of August 24, the troops of the Stalingrad Front attacked the 14th Panzer Corps from the north, which as a result was cut off from its rear and received air supplies for several days. After the capture of Rostov, the main forces of the

4th Panzer Army of Hoth were also sent to Stalingrad, which left only one tank corps in the Caucasus. By August 30, the troops of the South-Eastern Front, under

pressure from superior enemy forces, retreated to the outer contour of the defense of Stalingrad. The city was defended by the 62nd Army of General Vasily Chuikov and the 64th Army of General Mikhail Shumilov, who occupied positions along the Rynok-Orlovka-Gumrak-Peschanka-Ivanovka line. On August 31, tanks of the 28th Panzer Corps of the 4th German Panzer Army cut the Stalingrad-Morozovsk railway.

In the meantime, the Headquarters handed over to the Stalingrad Front the 24th, 1st Guards, 66th Armies, which were supposed to defeat the German 28th Tank Corps with a counterattack and link up with the Soviet troops in Stalingrad. The 1st Guards Army of General Kirill Moskalenko attacked on September 3, the 24th and 66th on September 5 and 6, but failed. The troops were brought in directly from the wheels, not knowing the exact location of the German positions. On September 11, the offensive, which cost the Soviet troops heavy losses, was stopped. One of the reasons for the failure was the lack of artillery shells. But these attacks diverted part of the German forces from Stalingrad and did not allow Paulus's army to quickly take the city.

On September 10, the 62nd Army withdrew to the city. Its divisions were cut off from the 64th Army, which was fighting in the south. By September 13, the Germans occupied the western outskirts of the city, the airport and barracks, and went to the railway station. The air was dominated by the Luftwaffe. In the battles for Stalingrad, the Germans used the tactics of assault groups, which by the end of September they had adopted from the defending Soviet troops. General Vasily Chuikov recalled: "The assault group usually consisted of a platoon or company of infantry (from 20 to 50 shooters) (50 shooters are more like two platoons, not a company. - B. S.), reinforced by 2-3 guns for **direct** firing tip, 1-2 squads of sappers and chemists. All personnel were provided with machine guns and a large number of hand grenades.

The last, fourth, general assault on Stalingrad began on November 11. German troops managed to capture the southern part of the territory of the Barrikady plant and, in a narrow section of 600 m, break through to the Volga in the area of the Barrikady plant. The 62nd Army was divided into three parts. Its main forces defended the territory of the Krasny Oktyabr plant. The assault was called off after the start of the Soviet counter-offensive on 19 November.

The 6th Army reached the banks of the Volga in Stalingrad itself, capturing 90% of the territory turned into ruins of the city and cutting the Soviet troops in two.

Both German and Soviet troops were constantly reinforced during the battle for Stalingrad. So, from July 23 to October 1, 55 rifle divisions, 9 rifle brigades, 7 tank corps and 30 separate tank brigades arrived here. The German command, in turn, was forced to redirect the main forces of the 4th Panzer Army to Stalingrad. The exact losses of the parties during

the offensive of the German troops on Stalingrad are unknown. It is only known that Soviet losses during street battles were many times higher than German ones, since German troops were better suited for such battles, developed the tactics of assault groups and organized the interaction of infantry, artillery, tanks and aircraft. Therefore, already after the war, Marshal Rodion Malinovsky, when he was his Minister of Defense, argued that the best course of action for the Soviet troops in the summer and autumn of 1942 would be a deliberate retreat behind

Volga with the preliminary evacuation of the population of Stalingrad and the equipment of the main Stalingrad factories. Then the Soviet infantry would not have suffered heavy losses in street battles, and the Soviet artillery from the left bank of the Volga would continuously fire at the positions of the German troops in Stalingrad, which would inflict serious losses on them. With a powerful grouping of Soviet troops in front of them behind the Volga, the German 6th Army would not have risked continuing the offensive towards Astrakhan. In addition, Paulus' flanks would also be threatened by strong Soviet armies. But for reasons of prestige, Stalin did not want to surrender Stalingrad and demanded that Chuikov's fighters, pressed to the Volga, hold the Stalingrad ruins at any cost. Therefore, Malinovsky's proposal could not be accepted, although it had its reasons, and the ratio of losses if implemented would be more favorable for the Red Army.

The myth of the House of Sergeant Pavlov

The main myth of the famous House of Sergeant Pavlov in Stalingrad is the assertion that during the defensive period of fighting in the city, it was defended by a detachment of Soviet soldiers under the command of Sergeant Yakov Fedotovitch Pavlov. The

House of Sergeant Pavlov is a four-story building of the Regional Consumer Union in the center of Stalingrad on January 9 Square (then address: Penzenskaya Street, 61). It became a symbol of the steadfastness and heroism of the Red Army soldiers during the Battle of Stalingrad. At the end of September 1942, a reconnaissance group of four soldiers led by Sergeant Yakov Pavlov from the 42nd Guards Rifle Regiment of the 13th Guards Division, General Alexander Ilyich Rodimtsev, occupied this house. There were no Germans there at that moment, although Pavlov himself later claimed the opposite in his memoirs. Since Pavlov's group was the first to enter this building, later on the maps it began to be designated as "Pavlov's house". A day later, a machine-gun platoon of senior lieutenant Ivan Filippovich Afanasyev was transferred to reinforce the defenders of the house, who took command. The number of defenders of the house increased to 24. Since the dead and wounded during the siege were replaced by new Red Army soldiers, the entire "Pavlov's house" was defended by 29 fighters. Of these, three died during the defense - lieutenant mortar A. N. Chernyshenko, privates I. Ya. Khait and I. T. Svirin. In addition, one nurse and two nurses from local residents were constantly in the house. Afanasiev also mentions in his memoirs two "cowards who were plotting to desert", who, apparently, were shot. All the time, a young mother with her newborn daughter also remained in the house, hiding there from the bombing. The defenders of the "Pavlov's house" repulsed the German attacks and held the building, from which the approaches to the Volga were clearly visible. Pavlov recalled: "There was not a day for the Nazis to leave our house alone. Our garrison, which did not allow them to take a step further, was worse than a thorn in their eye. Day by day they intensified the shelling, apparently deciding to burn the house to ashes. Once the German artillery fired for a whole day without a break. Before

the house was a cemented fuel storage, to which they dug an underground passage. Another convenient position was equipped behind the house, about thirty meters away, where there was a hatch for a water tunnel, where an underground passage was also dug. When the shelling began, the fighters immediately went to the shelter. This circumstance explains the relatively small losses suffered by the defenders of the house. The Germans, on the other hand, preferred to shell the "Pavlov's house" rather than attack it, realizing that it would be difficult to take this building by storm. On November 26, after the encirclement of the 6th German army in Stalingrad, Pavlov was seriously wounded in the leg during an attack on a house occupied by the Germans, and he was evacuated to the hospital. Later, he fought as a gunner and commander of a reconnaissance squad in artillery units. June 17, 1945 he was awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union. And soon Sergeant Pavlov was awarded the rank of junior lieutenant, in which he retired to the reserve in 1946. After the war, Pavlov visited Stalingrad and signed on the wall of the restored house. It also has an inscription made by one of the Red Army soldiers during the fighting: "This house was defended by the Guards Sergeant Yakov Fedotovich Pavlov." The figure of Pavlov, canonized by Soviet propaganda during the days of the war (then an essay about the "Pavlov's house" appeared in Pravda), obscured the figure of the one who really commanded the garrison of the legendary house, Lieutenant Afanasyev. Ivan Filippovich survived the war, but never received the title of Hero of the Soviet Union. In 1951, Pavlov published his memoirs In Stalingrad, where there is not a word about Afanasiev. Guard captain Afanasiev was seriously shell-shocked in the last days of the defense of the "Pavlov's house", and after the war he was almost completely blind and in 1951 he was forced to retire from the army. In 1970, he also published his memoirs, The House of Soldier's Glory. In 1958, Afanasiev settled in Stalingrad, and in the early 1970s, thanks to a successful operation, his sight was restored. Afanasiev died in Stalingrad in 1975 at the age of 59 - wounds and contusions affected. Pavlov was elected three times as a deputy of the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR from the Novgorod region, he graduated from the Higher Party School. In 1980 he was awarded the title of honorary citizen of Volgograd. Yakov Fedotovich Pavlov died in Novgorod on September 28, 1981, three weeks before his 64th birthday. Old wound

In Novgorod, the Pavlov Museum operates in the Ya. F. Pavlov boarding school for orphans. The history of the "Pavlov's house" was reflected in the novel by Vasily Grossman "Life and Fate", where Lieutenant Berezkin, whose prototype was Ivan Afanasyev, is shown as the head of the garrison. In 1965, a memorial wall was opened next to the "Pavlov's house". The modern address of the famous house: st. Sovetskaya, 39. And two houses from it, a memorial plaque was opened on the house in which Ivan Afanasyev lived and died. The fact that Sergeant Pavlov, and not Lieutenant Afanasyev, was chosen for the role of the hero was explained not only by the accidental circumstance that on the maps the famous house was designated as "Pavlov's house" - after the name of the unit commander who first entered it. An even more important role was played by the fact that propaganda needed a hero from among the soldiers who defended Stalingrad, so the candidacy of Sergeant Pavlov was preferable to that of Lieutenant Afanasyev. In his memoirs, General Rodimtsev directly calls Lieutenant Afanasyev the former head of the garrison of the "Pavlov's house", who "thanks to his energy and courage, this house turned into an invincible fortress", and describes his difficult fate: "For twelve whole years there was darkness all around him. The head of the department of eye diseases of the Volgograd Medical Institute, Professor Alexander Mikhailovich Vodovozov became interested in the fate of the hero of Stalingrad and decided to perform an eye operation on him. The operation took place without anesthesia, the patient himself was an assistant to the professor. Overcoming the pain, from which it seemed that the mind was about to fade, Afanasyev answered the professor's questions during the operation, when syringe needles, the tip of a scalpel and other surgical instruments invaded the eyes. This could only endure hardened in severe trials

warrior.

In the memory of Ivan Filippovich, Stalingrad remained a city of ruins. When the scientist restored his sight, Afanasyev saw another city, reborn to life from dust and ashes, into which the Nazis had turned it ... "Maybe it is worth conferring on Ivan Filippovich Afanasyev the title of Hero of Russia posthumously?

The myth of El Alamein

The main myth of the battle of El Alamein is that the troops of the 8th British Army, General Bernard Montgomery, had an overwhelming superiority over the German-Italian Panzer Army "Africa" of Field Marshal Erwin Rommel, both in people and in military equipment.

The battle of El Alamein lasted from October 23 to November 4. If successful, Rommel expected to repel the offensive, exhaust the British forces in Egypt, and then break into the Nile Valley.

The former chief of staff of the German Afrika Korps, General Fritz Bayerlein, recalled: "The lack of fuel for tanks and the overwhelming superiority of the British in the air ruled out the possibility of winning the battle. We had to hold our positions at all costs. Any gap in our positions had to be immediately eliminated by counterattacks so that the enemy could not use it to break through our entire line of defense. To this end, Rommel ordered the approaches to our positions to be mined and the so-called "devil's gardens" to be built. At the forefront, Italian battalions alternated with German ones. The front line was held by one German division, one German parachute brigade and five Italian infantry divisions. The mobile reserve was located as follows: in the northern sector of the front - the 15th German Panzer Division and the Italian Panzer Division "Littorio", behind them - the 90th German Light Division and the Italian Division "Trieste" and in the south as an army reserve - 21st German Panzer Division and the Italian Panzer Division "Ariete". By the beginning of the battle, Montgomery's 8th Army consisted of 7 infantry and three armored divisions, as well as four independent armored brigades.

The Afrika Korps had two German armored divisions, one German motorized (light) division, one German infantry division and a German parachute brigade. The Italian troops consisted of two Italian armored divisions,

one Italian motorized division and five Italian infantry divisions. As early as September 23, Rommel, ill, went on vacation, and General Georg Stumme, the former commander of the 40th Panzer Corps, recalled from the Eastern Front after the incident with Major Reichel, took command of the Army "Africa". On October 24, at the very beginning of the battle, he died of a heart attack, and on the 25th Rommel, who had urgently returned from Germany, again took command. On the night of October 24, the British went on the offensive on their northern

flank, where six divisions, including two armored ones, dealt the main blow. In the south, three divisions, including one armored, carried out an auxiliary strike. Due to a lack of fuel, the German command was forced to disperse its tanks along the entire front. British aircraft and submarines sank a number of fuel tankers destined for the German-Italian Army "Africa". Due to the lack of ammunition, the German-Italian troops could not even launch an artillery attack on the British troops prepared for the offensive.

Already on the morning of the 24th, the British infantry, with the help of artillery, made two passes in the enemy minefields, through which the tanks moved to attack. On 26 October, the German 15th Panzer Division and the Italian Littorio Panzer Division counter-attacked and pushed the British armored units back to the top of Kidney Hill. Rommel moved the 21st Panzer Division to the northern flank to stop the British advance. On October 27, she unsuccessfully attacked the enemy, but on October 28, in turn, she was able to repel a British attack. However, on the evening of October 28, the British broke through north of Kidney. On the morning of October 31, British armored units broke through to the coastal road. However, a counterattack by two German panzer divisions made it possible to restore contact with the troops encircled in the northern salient.

On the night of November 1/2, Montgomery shifted his main attack to the southern flank. Rommel's counterattack on the morning of 2 November was able to localize the breakthrough. However, during this day he used up 2.5 times more ammunition than he could get by sea. By the morning of November 3, the Germans and Italians had only 35 serviceable tanks left. On this day, the British attacks weakened, and Rommel began to withdraw to a position in the Fuka area.

However, on the same day, an order was received from the Fuhrer ordering to stand to the death and promising to improve the supply of the Afrika Korps. On November 4, the British broke through at Tel el-Mampsra. Here the commander of the German African Corps, General Ritter Wilhelm von Thoma, was captured. The 20th Italian mechanized corps suffered a heavy defeat. On November 4, Rommel gave the order to retreat to Fuka. In

terms of the number of personnel, the forces of the opponents were approximately equal. But British aviation dominated the air. Montgomery's army had about 1,000 tanks, while the Germans had 283 tanks and assault guns, and the Italians had 324. In addition, due to the fact that the British air and navy dominated the Mediterranean, the German-Italian troops in Egypt were sitting on a hungry soldering fuel and ammunition. Because of this, it turned out to be impossible to quickly transfer the bulk of the tanks to the places of the British breakthroughs. On November 4, the Afrika Korps began their retreat. On November 5, this withdrawal was sanctioned by Hitler.

But the position at Phuc was already captured by the British. Rommel withdrew troops to the Mersa-Maruch line, but on November 8 he was forced to withdraw due to the threat of a detour from the south. On this day, American troops landed in Algiers. On the night of November 13, the British occupied Tobruk. On November 20, they occupied Benghazi, covering 850 km in two weeks. In early December, Rommel was able to keep only Tunisia. The German-Italian troops lost almost all their tanks, primarily due to lack of fuel. On November 23, the Germans had 26 combat-ready tanks in service, and the Italians had 12 tanks left in the

Ariette division. Rommel's troops lost 2.3 thousand killed, 5.5 thousand wounded and 30 thousand prisoners (including 8 thousand Germans and 22 thousand Italians). Allied losses amounted to only 13.5 thousand people, including 4.5 thousand irretrievable losses, and 432 tanks. Another 128 tanks were damaged.

The defeat of the Italo-German troops was due not to the numerical superiority of the British troops, which, in fact, did not exist, and not to Montgomery's one and a half times superiority in tanks, but to the dominance of British aviation in the air and the inability to regularly supply the Afrika Korps through the Mediterranean Sea.

The myth of the Stalingrad counteroffensive

The main myth of the Stalingrad counter-offensive of the Red Army is that it turned out to be absolutely unexpected for the German command. It is also alleged that the Headquarters of the Supreme High Command decided to throw against the 4th Panzer Army of Hermann Goth, who was trying to unblock the 6th Army of Friedrich Paulus, the 2nd Guards Army of Rodion Malinovsky, instead of using it either to develop an offensive on Rostov-on-Don, or to eliminate the encircled group in Stalingrad. Strategically, the Soviet counteroffensive could not have been

sudden. As a result of the offensive, the front of the German 6th Army was an elongated wedge, the tip of which ended in Stalingrad. The flanks of the 6th army were defended by the much less combat-ready 3rd and 4th Romanian armies. However, the German command believed that the Red Army was too weakened as a result of the defeats suffered to launch a powerful counteroffensive and crush the enemy's defenses. The OKH operational order of October 14, providing for a transition to the defensive, stated: "The Russians themselves have been seriously weakened during the last battles and will not be able to have the same large forces in the winter of 1942/43 as they had last winter." Hitler wanted to keep Stalingrad for reasons of prestige. As early as October 6, the commander of the Stalingrad Front, Eremenko, submitted a report to Stalin, where it is proposed to

encircle the 6th Army, hitting the Romanian units, and after the breakthrough, unite in the Kalach-on-Don area. At first, the Headquarters considered this plan too risky due to the too great depth of the operation and proposed a more modest plan, under which the Don Front was asked to deliver the main blow in the direction of Kotluban, break through the front and go to the Gumrak area. The Stalingrad front was to advance from the Gornaya Polyana region to Yelypanka and, after breaking through the enemy defenses, move to the Gumrak region on

connection with the troops of Rokossovsky. In this case, only 12 German divisions that fought in Stalingrad itself fell into the "cauldron". But in the end, it was decided to return to the original plan for a deeper environment.

In October 1942, the General Staff developed the final version of the plan for the operation to defeat enemy troops on the Volga, conventionally called "Uranus". The right-flank strike force of the Southwestern Front, advancing from the bridgeheads southwest of the city of Serafimovich and from the area of the village of Kletskaya, was supposed to break through the defenses of the 3rd Romanian army and advance to the southeast in the general direction of Kalach. The troops of the left flank of the front created the outer front of the encirclement, reaching the Veshenskaya-Bokovaya line and further along the Chir River to the village of Verkhne-Chirskaya. The troops of the Don Front advanced on the village of Vertyachiy from the bridgehead near the village of Kletskaya and from the area of the village of Kachalinskaya along the left bank of the Don. They were supposed to surround the enemy grouping in the small bend of the Don. The strike force of the Stalingrad Front was advancing south of Stalingrad on Sovetsky, Kalach and was supposed to connect here with the troops of the Southwestern Front, inflicting a defeat on the 4th Romanian Army. Soviet troops had about twice as many people (1.1 million against more than 500 thousand Germans and Romanians), twice as many tanks and one and a half times as many artillery, with an approximate equality of forces in aviation. Two Romanian armies numbered 239.3 thousand people, and the 6th German army and the 4th army corps of the

4th tank army - about 250 thousand people. For the Germans, the power and good organization of the Soviet counteroffensive turned out to be a surprise. In addition, Hitler and his generals did not expect that the allied Romanian

troops would show such a low combat capability. Some information about the preparation of the Stalingrad counteroffensive from the German command was available. So, on November 7, Hitler and other leaders of the Wehrmacht were informed of an important message from one of the agents of the Abwehr, according to which on November 4, the Soviet Headquarters decided to conduct a series of offensive operations before November 15. The main blows were supposed to be delivered from Grozny in the direction of Mozdok, in the area of Lower and Upper Mamont near Voronezh, as well

Leningrad. There would be enough time to withdraw the 6th Army from Stalingrad. In fact, the Soviet troops were originally supposed to go on the offensive near Stalingrad at an earlier date (in one of the reports to Stalin appears on November 15), and only a delay in the concentration of forces and means forced to postpone its start until November 19. In reality, the Soviet Southwestern Front delivered the main blow not on its right wing, near the Upper and Lower Mamon hamlets, against the Italians, but on its left wing, against the Romanians. However, it is quite likely that a deeper envelopment of the enemy and a strike on the right flank of the Southwestern Front were originally envisaged, as the unknown agent reported. And in any case, a strike from the southwest threatened to cut

off the German group at Stalingrad. The only way to avoid this was the immediate withdrawal of Paulus's army beyond the Don. However, Hitler did not want to withdraw troops to the Don - this would mean recognition of the collapse of the strategy on the Eastern Front.

About 210 thousand people ended up in the "boiler", including about 5 thousand Romanians and more than 20 thousand Russian volunteers. About 30,000 people were evacuated by air, most of them wounded. Since the minimum need to supply the 6th Army, which was experiencing a shortage of food, is 600 tons, to meet it, it was necessary to land at least 300 Yu-52 transport aircraft daily in Stalingrad, while during the operation of the air bridge, on average, 6th army delivered only 94 tons of cargo. From the end of November 1942, preparations began for a new offensive operation of

the Soviet troops on the outer front of the encirclement near Stalingrad, which received the code name "Saturn". The troops of the Southwestern and left wing of the Voronezh Fronts were to defeat the main forces of the 8th Italian Army, which was defending on the Middle Don at the turn of the settlements Novaya Kalitva - Veshenskaya, and the Wehrmacht troops on the Chir River and in the Tormosino region, and then advance in the general direction to Millerovo and Rostov-on-Don to cut off Army Group A in the Caucasus.

In early December, the troops of the Don and Stalingrad fronts launched an offensive on the inner front of the encirclement in order to eliminate the 6th German army. However, by December 8, the offensive was stopped by the Germans, whose battle formations condensed after the encirclement. In addition, frost and deep snow did not favor offensive operations. The Headquarters planned to resume the offensive near Stalingrad on December 18.

However, on December 1, the commander of Army Group Don, Field Marshal Manstein, ordered on December 8 to begin an operation to release the encircled, code-named Winter Thunderstorm. The 4th Panzer Army of Hoth was supposed to strike from the Kotelnikovo area in the rear or on the flank of the Soviet troops occupying the outer front of the encirclement to the south or west of Stalingrad. At the same time, the 48th Panzer Corps from the army group of General Karl Adolf Hollidt was supposed to strike at the rear of the Soviet troops from the bridgehead on the Don and Chir rivers in the area of the village of Nizhne-Chirskaya. At that moment, when the distance between the outer and inner fronts of the encirclement would be reduced to 30 km, the 6th Army was to launch a counterattack in the direction of the Tsaritsa River. This counter strike was called Operation Thunderclap. But the German 48th Corps failed to launch an offensive from the bridgehead on Chir, since it itself was attacked by the troops of the Southwestern Front. Here was the shortest distance to the encircled, so the Soviet command concentrated significant forces against Hollidt.

The offensive of the boiler group had to be postponed to December 12, since it was necessary to wait for the arrival of the 6th Panzer Division, the main striking force of the 4th Panzer Army, from France. The deblocking grouping, numbering more than 600 tanks, was opposed by the 51st Army of General Nikolai Trufanov. She, taking into account the approaching reserves, was not inferior to the enemy in the number of personnel and artillery, but had three times fewer tanks.

Before connecting with Paulus, Gota had to go 120 km. The offensive was carried out along the Tikhoretsk-Stalingrad railway. On December 12, German tanks broke through the defenses of the 51st Army near the Kurmoyarsky half-station. On December 13, the Gota group reached the Aksai River and captured bridgeheads on its northern bank. On December 14 and 15, the 51st Army, with the support of the 4th Tank Corps of General Volsky

launched a counterattack and recaptured the Verkhne-Kumsky farm from the enemy. The fighting for this farm continued until December 19, when the Germans again occupied Verkhne-Kumsky and pushed Trufanov's army back to the Myshkova River - the last natural frontier on the way to Stalingrad, which was 50 km away. On

December 19, Manstein asked the OKW to give permission to Paulus for a breakthrough, and Paulus himself ordered to prepare "Thunderbolt".

In connection with the offensive of the boiler group, Stalin ordered the postponement of Operation Saturn. The 2nd Guards Army of General Malinovsky, originally intended for its implementation, even before the start of the Goth offensive, was decided to be thrown into the defeat of the Stalingrad group. However, after the 51st Army began to retreat rapidly, Stalin, on the advice of Vasilevsky, decided to use the 2nd Guards Army against the boiler group. As subsequent events showed, the optimal solution would be to use Malinovsky's army to attack Rostov, since the Goth army was forced to start a retreat due to the defeat of the Italians on the Don even before the 2nd Guards Army was brought into battle in the boiler area. As for the idea of using Malinovsky's army to eliminate the Stalingrad group, which was defended by the commander of the Don Front, Rokossovsky, this decision would hardly have led to a quick surrender of the 6th Army. After all, when in January the Don Front began an operation to eliminate the "cauldron", having received reinforcements no less than Malinovsky's army, the fighting in Stalingrad still continued for three weeks, despite the fact that Paulus's army by that time was much more exhausted and experienced more acute ammunition difficulties than in December.

On December 16, Operation Little Saturn was launched by the forces of the Voronezh and the right wing of the Southwestern Fronts. As a result, already on December 21, the 8th Italian army was defeated. Soviet troops began to threaten the rear of Army Group Don. On December 23, Manstein had to order Hoth to stop the offensive and transfer the most powerful 6th Panzer Division to repel the Soviet offensive on the Middle Don. Manstein believed that the only salvation for the 6th Army was an immediate breakthrough to connect with the boiler group, which was still located near the Myshkova River. On

this time Hitler did not object to the breakthrough either. However, Paulus did not dare to break through, believing that he did not have enough fuel to connect with Gotha. To break through the 6th Army, it was necessary to regroup, which would have taken several days under conditions of fuel shortage and snowy and frosty winter. And during this time, the Gotha group would have been forced to retreat even further south, and even breaking through the inner front of the encirclement, the German soldiers would have found themselves in the snowy steppe without fuel and food, which would mean

certain death. After the failure of Operation Winter Storm, the encircled were doomed. On January 10, 1943, the last offensive of the Don Front of General Konstantin Rokossovsky began against the army of Paulus, who, having been promoted to field marshal, capitulated on January 31. On February 2, the northern group of the encircled ceased resistance.

Until January 10, 1943, the Stalingrad group lost about 10 thousand people killed. At least 40 thousand Wehrmacht and Allied soldiers and officers died after January 10th. 130 thousand people were taken prisoner, including 110 thousand Germans, and the rest were the so-called "voluntary assistants" of the Wehrmacht ("Khivi") from among Soviet citizens, as well as 3 thousand Romanians and a small number of Croats. The losses of the two Romanian armies in the period from November 19, 1942 to January 7, 1943 amounted to about 160 thousand killed, wounded and captured. Their remnants were withdrawn from the front.

The situation of German prisoners taken in Stalingrad turned out to be no better than the situation of Soviet prisoners in German camps in the tragic winter of 1941/42. Of the 110 thousand Germans who were captured in Stalingrad, only 5 thousand survived, i.e. less than 5%. And of those Germans and Italians who were captured by the Anglo-Americans in North Africa in May 1943, significantly more than half survived. Characteristically, more than half of the surviving Stalingrad prisoners were officers. Officers' camps provided better food and better medical care. Tens of thousands of German soldiers died from starvation and epidemics, weakened by 73 days of malnutrition in the "boiler". In addition, the headquarters of the Don Front, which became the headquarters of the Central Front, already on February 4 began to be transferred to the area

Kursk. The rear services of the Don Front were no longer engaged in prisoners, and new structures had not yet been formed.

The German prisoners in Stalingrad were on a starvation diet for the last few weeks before the capture. However, much more could have been done to save them from starvation. How to explain, for example, the fact that during the captivity even the remnants of food were taken away from the unfortunate. What about foot marches from the ruins of Stalingrad to camps 20-30 kilometers from the city in 30-degree frost? For many, this was the "road of death." If the goal had been set to keep alive as many Stalingrad prisoners as possible, the number of survivors might have been an order of magnitude greater. But Stalin, equally merciless to his own and enemy soldiers, never set such a goal.

Soviet troops in the Stalingrad direction, according to official data, in the period from July 17, 1942 to February 2, 1943, lost 1,347,214 people, of which 674,990 were irrevocable. This does not include the troops of the NKVD and the people's militia, whose irretrievable losses were especially great. 15,000 artillery pieces, 4,341 tanks and 5,654 combat aircraft were also lost.

The myth of the battle for the Caucasus

The main myth of the battle for the Caucasus lies in the assertion that the initial success of the Germans, who managed to reach the Caucasian passes and capture them, was due to their significant superiority in people and military equipment. Equally mythological is the opinion that the successful retreat of German troops from the Caucasus to the Taman Peninsula was caused primarily by the lack of forces and means on the Soviet Transcaucasian Front.

The German plan for the summer-autumn campaign of 1942 set the capture of the Caucasus as a primary goal. It was supposed to encircle and destroy the troops of the Southern Front, which had retreated across the Don River, to the south and southeast of Rostov-on-Don, and to seize the North Caucasus. Then the German and allied troops were to bypass the Greater Caucasus with one group from the west, capturing Novorossiysk and Tuapse, and with another group from the east, capturing the oil-bearing regions of Grozny and Baku. At the same time, the German mountain rifle units were to overcome the central part of the Main Caucasian Range through

the passes and invade Georgia. On June 28, the 4th Panzer Army of the Wehrmacht under the command of Hermann Goth broke through the front between Kursk and Kharkov and rushed to the Don. During the first week of the general summer offensive, German troops captured more than 200 thousand prisoners. The 4th Panzer Army traveled about 200 km in 10 days and deeply bypassed the grouping of the Soviet

Southern Front from the north and took Rostov-on-Don on July 23. In July, the troops of the Southern and Southwestern Fronts lost 568,347 soldiers and commanders, including about 80,000 prisoners, 2,436 tanks, 13,716 guns and mortars, and 783 combat aircraft. In July, the Wehrmacht lost 91.4 thousand people on the entire Eastern Front, including more than 19 thousand killed and missing. The 3rd Tank Corps of the 1st Tank Army alone captured 33.5 thousand prisoners by July 25, 422 guns and 109 tanks, losing 268 killed and missing and 1134 wounded. This ratio of losses, especially given the fact that a significant part of

The Rzhevsky bridgehead and the Leningrad region proves that in the Caucasian direction, the superiority in people and equipment was on the Soviet side, and only the mistakes of the Headquarters and the command of the fronts allowed the

Germans to break into the Caucasus. The German command knew that strong opposition to Soviet power existed among the Don, Kuban and Terek Cossacks, who fell victim to the policy of decossackization during the Civil War, and later to forced collectivization. Also, the mountain peoples of the North Caucasus continued the struggle for independence that they had waged against the Russian Empire. There were many opponents of Soviet power in the Transcaucasus. During the battle for the Caucasus, desertion was especially great from those divisions where the proportion of

Azerbaijanis, Armenians and Georgians was high. The Southern Front on July 28, 1942 was merged with Marshal Budyonny's North Caucasian Front. The attack on the Caucasus was carried out by the 17th and 1st German tank armies of Army Group A. Initially, it was supposed to use the 4th Panzer German Army and the 3rd Romanian Army in this direction as well. However, these armies were soon transferred to Stalingrad, leaving only one corps from their composition in Army Group A. In addition, the 17th Army was reinforced by the 42nd Army Corps, formerly part of the 11th Army in Crimea. He landed on the Taman Peninsula. In fact, due to the beginning of the battle for Stalingrad, the Germans sent to the Caucasus only a little more than half of the forces that they

had originally planned. The 51st and 37th Armies, which were defending on the left wing of the Southern Front, were defeated. They were unable to withdraw in an organized manner to the line of the Kagalnik River and the Manych Canal. The retreat turned into a disorderly flight.

German troops, meeting no resistance, moved to the Kuban. On August 3, the Germans took Voroshilovsk (now Stavropol). Krasnodar fell on August 12, and Mozdok on August 25. On August 9, the 1st German Panzer Army captured Maykop and continued to advance in the Tuapse direction. Before the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Maykop, oil wells were clogged and fuel supplies destroyed. Nevertheless, a month later, the Germans managed to partially restore oil production

stopped at the turn of Samurskaya, Khadyzhenskaya, south of Klyuchevaya and Stavropolskaya. The 17th German Army also failed to break

through to Tuapse. Already in early September, the commander of Army Group A, Field Marshal Wilhelm List, came to the conclusion that it would not be possible to break through into the Transcaucasus with the available forces and means. Field Marshal Keitel recalled that during a trip to the Caucasus, "having discussed the situation with the commander of the corps, General of the Mountain Infantry Troops Konrad and Field Marshal List, Jodl returned to Headquarters and reported to the Fuhrer that he shared List's point of view - the assigned combat mission could not be completed." This conclusion angered Hitler. On September 10, List was removed from his post as commander of Army Group A. Hitler temporarily took command of this army group. In fact, the operational leadership was carried out by the chief of staff of the army group, General Hans von Greifenberg, until on November 20, 1942, General Ewald von Kleist, who had previously commanded the 1st Panzer Army, was appointed to the

post of commander of Army Group A. During the period from July 25 to August 17, the Germans were able to advance to a depth of 600 km and reach the Main Caucasian Range. Having an advantage in mobility, German tank and motorized formations often preempted Soviet troops in occupying advantageous defensive lines. Nevertheless, they failed to encircle the main forces of the North Caucasian Front, which withdrew to the Caucasian foothills. The German troops of Army Group "A" during this period lost about 54 thousand killed, wounded and missing. Romanian troops also suffered significant losses.

On September 2, the troops of the German 1st Panzer Army began crossing the Terek near Mozdok. On the morning of September 2, the Germans began to cross the Terek, they managed to capture a small bridgehead, but the crossing of the main forces was disrupted by a flank attack by the Soviet 11th Guards Corps. On the night of September 4, Kleist's troops delivered a strong blow from the areas of Predmostny and Kizlyar to Voznesenskoye, but were stopped at the foot of the Tersky Range.

In early September, German troops captured the Marukh and Sanchar passes. On August 23, GKO member Lavrenty Beria arrived in Tbilisi from Moscow, replacing a number of responsible

workers of the army and front-line apparatus of the Transcaucasian Front, including the commander of the 46th Army, General Sergatskov, General Konstantin Leselidze. He also initiated the merger of the Transcaucasian and North Caucasian fronts on the basis of the Transcaucasian Front of General Ivan Tyulenev. The commander of the North Caucasian Front, Marshal Semyon Budyonny, was removed from his post.

Engineering barriers were installed in front of the most important passes on the roads to the Black Sea coast. A system of defense units, strongholds, pillboxes and bunkers, trenches and anti-tank ditches was built along the roads. On September 25, 1942, the German 17th Army, reinforced by two German and two Romanian infantry divisions, resumed the offensive on Tuapse and on September 29 broke through the defenses of the 18th and 56th armies.

On September 29, the Headquarters issued a directive to the Transcaucasian Front: "Despite the sufficient number of forces in the Khadyzhensko-Tuapse direction and the long time the troops were occupying defensive lines, the enemy managed from the very first days of the offensive to reach the flank and rear of the units of the 18th Army, defending the Khadyzhenskaya-Tuapse road.

Instead of a deeply echeloned strong defense, units of the 18th Army turned out to be scattered and, despite the overall superiority in forces, they turned out to be weaker than the advancing enemy in each individual direction ... They

did not try to restore the situation in the very first days, concentrate the necessary forces and go on a decisive counterattack, but strengthened defending units in small forces, which made it possible for the enemy to beat them piece by piece.

The directive ordered "immediately create strike groups, proceed to active operations and completely restore the situation in the area south of Khadyzhenskaya and in the Goryachiy Klyuch sector, bearing in mind in no case to prevent the enemy from breaking into the Tuapse area." On October 25, the German

1st Panzer Army went on the offensive in the direction of Nalchik. She managed to secretly regroup troops and take Nalchik on October 27, and Gizel on November 2. However, the German tank units failed to expand the breakthrough. November 5

Soviet troops launched a counteroffensive and recaptured Gisel on

November 11. Having pulled up reserves, the German 17th Army tried to break through to Tuapse again and in mid-November went on the offensive. The German-Romanian troops managed to penetrate the defenses of the 18th Army up to 8 km in depth, but their forces soon dried up, and after the encirclement of the 6th Army near Stalingrad, the attack on the Caucasus lost its meaning. By December 17, the Germans withdrew across the Pshish River and went on the defensive. The 3rd Panzer Corps of General Eberhard Mackensen, who delivered the main blow, from July 26 to November 12, 1942, captured 35.3 thousand prisoners, 50 aircraft, 605 guns and destroyed 188 tanks. The corps lost 2,682 killed, 501 missing (mostly Romanians) and 10,698 wounded.

On November 13, units of the 9th and 37th armies went on the offensive, but within ten days they failed to break through the enemy defenses, but only wedged to a depth of 10 km, reaching the eastern banks of the Ardon and Fiagdon rivers. On November 27, the troops of the left flank of the 9th Army launched an offensive in the general direction of Digora. At the turn of the Ardon River, they were stopped by the Viking division. Three-day attempts to break through the defense were unsuccessful. Equally ineffective were the attacks undertaken on 4 December. Forces and means were dispersed. So, for example, in the 9th Army, the 3rd Rifle Corps, operating in the direction of the main attack, had only two tank brigades and two artillery reinforcement regiments, while the 11th Guards Rifle Corps, advancing in a secondary direction, had two tank brigades and three artillery regiment. Not the last role was played by the poor intelligence work, which failed to reveal the location of the German positions. Infantry interaction was not organized, tanks and aircraft.

On December 28, German troops began to gradually withdraw to intermediate defense lines along the Laba, Kuban, Yegorlyk, Manych rivers.

By the beginning of 1943, the Southern and Transcaucasian fronts had over 1 million people, more than 11.3 thousand guns and mortars, about 1.3 thousand tanks and 900 aircraft. They were opposed by Task Force Hollidt, 4th and 1st Panzer and 17th Armies, which numbered

764 thousand people, about 5.3 thousand guns and mortars, 700 tanks, 530 aircraft.

The Soviet command sought to dismember and defeat the main forces of Army Group A, preventing their withdrawal from the North Caucasus.

But already on the night of January 1, 1943, the German 1st Panzer Army, hiding behind strong rearguards, began to retreat. The Northern Group of Forces of the Transcaucasian Front, advancing from the area north of Mozdok, did not achieve success. Formations of the 44th Army of General Khomenko, and then of the 58th Army of General Melnik, delivered strikes with limited forces. Only on January 3, when the enemy withdrew not only the main forces of the 1st Panzer Army, but also parts of the cover, the Northern Group of Forces began to pursue, but it was carried out indecisively and disorganized. The Black Sea Group of Forces did not have time to complete the regrouping and go on the offensive in time. During the pursuit, the Soviet cavalry corps and tank brigades managed to fall behind the infantry. In many respects, the failure of the operation to encircle Army Group A in the North Caucasus was due to the fact that the Soviet troops were exhausted by the previous battles, suffered significant losses and were forced to go on the offensive with a grouping that was unsuitable for this force, formed during defensive battles.

Part of the forces of the 1st Panzer Army retreated to Rostov, defending north of the Kuban River. Four divisions from the 1st Panzer Army, located south of the Kuban River, and the entire 17th Army were forced to retreat to the Taman Peninsula. At the same time, in January, the tank divisions of the 1st Tank Army were transferred to Ukraine. For the skillful organization of the retreat to Taman, Ewald von Kleist was promoted to field marshal on February 1, 1943.

The myth of the German flag on Elbrus

The myth associated with the hoisting of the German military flag by the German mountain shooters on Elbrus lies in the assertion that this was carried out on a special assignment from Hitler as an important ideological and political action, carried out, in particular, under the influence of the mystical teachings of the Thule society, of which he allegedly adhered. Captain Grotto, who led the ascent, allegedly was an SS man, for this act he allegedly received the Knight's Cross from the hands of Hitler. Thus, the actions of the Soviet mountain shooters, who, after the Germans left, climbed Elbrus and threw down Nazi flags from the top, were also of particular importance. The German 49th mountain rifle corps and two Romanian

mountain rifle divisions acted against units of the 46th Army of the Transcaucasian Front, defending the passes of the Main Caucasian Range. In fact, there were no mountain rifle troops in the Red Army, although some divisions were called mountain rifle divisions, but all their difference from ordinary infantry was that there were pack animals in the state of mountain rifle divisions. The Soviet infantrymen were not prepared for military operations in the mountains, they did not have the necessary equipment and weapons and mountaineering training. By mid-August, parts of the German 1st and 4th mountain rifle divisions approached the Klukhor Pass and Elbrus. On August 21, with the help of guides from the local Balkar population, German climbers hoisted flags with the emblems of the 1st and 4th mountain rifle divisions - edelweiss and carnations. The ascent was commanded by Captain Heinz Groth from the 1st Division. He was under the command of Captain Max Gemmerler of the 4th Division. On the way, the Germans disarmed a detachment of 13 Red Army soldiers in the Shelter of Eleven Hotel, some of whom were attached to them as porters and guides, and the rest were released, having been provided with food on the way back. Oberfeldwebel Kümmerle of the 1st Mountain Division planted a German military flag with a swastika on top of Elbrus. Next to it were installed the standards of the 1st and 4th mountain

rifle divisions. In total, the group included 14 servicemen of the 1st Mountain Rifle Division and 4 from the 4th, as well as two cameramen - Wolfgang Gorter and Hanz Ertel. The decision to carry out this ascent came to the officers of two mountain rifle divisions spontaneously, after abundant consumption of local corn moonshine. And then they received permission from the commander of the 49th Mountain Rifle Corps, General Rudolf Konrad. The installation of German flags on the top of Elbrus had no military significance. This action even caused the displeasure of Hitler, who called the ascent a purely sporting achievement. The Fuhrer nevertheless allowed the fact of hoisting German flags on Elbrus to be used for propaganda purposes. Their photographs began to be published in magazines, and the filmed chronicle was shown in cinemas. The commander of the group that climbed Elbrus, Heinz Groth, who became a major, really received the Knight's Cross, but this happened on May 9, 1945, already under Hitler's successor, Grand Admiral Karl Dönitz, and it is not known whether he was awarded this award for climbing Elbrus or for some other feat. Heinz Groth was a judge after the war and died on 28 April 1994 at the age of 88. By the way, contrary to the legend, neither the Grotto nor the other climbers had ever been in the Caucasus before and climbed Elbrus until 1942. On February 2, 1943, when the German mountain shooters left the Caucasus, the head of the mountaineering department of the operational group of the Transcaucasian Front, military engineer of the 3rd rank Alexander Gusev, was ordered to conduct an "examination of the bases of enemy fortifications in the Elbrus region, the removal of fascist pennants from the peaks and the establishment of the state flags of the USSR". Soviet climbers led by junior lieutenant Nikolai Gusak climbed Elbrus and on February 13 and 17 installed Soviet flags on both peaks of Elbrus. This was done by Alexander Sidorenko and Beknu Khergiani. It is interesting that they did not find the German flags themselves at the top, but only the roots from them on alpenstocks. It can be assumed that before the retreat, the Germans removed the flags (after the war, Grotto recalled that they climbed Elbrus twice) or they fell into disrepair. They did not find there a note of German climbers, which is usually left during the ascent. It should be said that the winter ascent of Elbrus

a much more difficult operation than a summer climb. Alexander Mikhailovich Gusev after the war headed the Department of Marine Physics of Moscow State University and died in 1994 at the age of 82. In his memoirs, Gusev claimed that during the ascent in the vicinity of Elbrus, groups of stragglers from their German huntsmen wandered around, allegedly turning into bandits, against whom the NKVD units acted. In fact, all the German mountain shooters left the Main Caucasian Range, and only partisan detachments from the Balkars continued to operate here.

The myth of Little Earth

During the reign of Leonid Ilyich Brezhnev in the USSR, propaganda propagated the myth that the Soviet landing in February 1943 in the Novorossiysk region and the subsequent holding of the bridgehead (the so-called Malaya Zemlya) for 225 days was one of the most important events of the war, almost comparable in importance to Kursk and Stalingrad battles. This was due to the fact that Brezhnev was the head of the political department of the 18th army, units of which landed near Novorossiysk. Leonid Ilyich himself visited Malaya Zemlya more than once, and called Malaya Zemlya his first and most widely publicized book of his memoirs. In connection with this, an anecdote was born among the people: a war veteran in the military registration and enlistment office is asked: "Was he on Malaya Zemlya? - No. "Ah, bitch, I sat out on the

Kursk Bulge." On August 19, 1942, in the Novorossiysk direction, the German 17th Army went on the offensive, inflicting the main blow on Novorossiysk and Anapa and auxiliary blows on Temryuk and the Taman Peninsula. The Soviet 47th Army, inferior in strength, was able to repel the offensive and by August 25 to push the enemy back. But on August 28, German troops resumed their offensive and captured Anapa on August 31, as a result of which the marine units defending the Taman Peninsula were cut off from the main forces of the 47th Army. On September 7, the Germans broke into Novorossiysk, captured the railway station, then the port, and by September 11 captured the city. However, Novorossiysk remained under fire from Soviet artillery, and the enemy was never able to use it as a port. The 17th Army was never able to break through to Tuapse. After the retreat of German troops from

the Caucasus in January 1943, Hitler ordered the 17th Army to hold the Taman Peninsula, which, on the one hand, covered the strategically important Crimea, and on the other hand, could serve as a springboard for a new Wehrmacht offensive in the Caucasus. The Germans erected a strong defensive line on Taman - the so-called "blue line". To supply the 17th Army

A cable car was laid across the Kerch Strait. Fighting on the Blue Line lasted from February to September 1943. On February 4, an amphibious assault was landed in the region of Novorossiysk in order to liberate the city. The main landing group in the area of South Ozereyka, numbering 1.5 thousand people, was destroyed by the Germans. On the other hand, an auxiliary landing in the Myskhako area, numbering about 300 people, under the command of Major Caesar Lvovich Kunikov, managed to capture and hold the bridgehead, later called Malaya Zemlya. However, the commander of the Black Sea Fleet, Admiral Philip Oktyabrsky, did not dare to land the second echelon of the main landing force here and try to capture Novorossiysk on the move, but instead returned the ships to Gelendzhik. The second echelon of the main landing was landed in the Myskhako area only after the personal order of the commander of the Transcaucasian Front, General Ivan Tyulenev. The second wave of landing forces made its way to the Stanichki area, covering the right flank of the bridgehead. For poor preparations for the landing in the Novorossiysk region, Oktyabrsky was removed from command of the Black Sea Fleet and appointed commander of the Amur Flotilla. Kunikov's detachment later received reinforcements and managed to hold the bridgehead, which, however, was completely shot through by the Germans. Kunikov himself was soon seriously wounded and on

February 14 died of his wounds in a hospital in Gelendzhik. On April 17, 1943, he was posthumously awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union. All this high title was awarded to 21 defenders of Malaya Zemlya. There was no way to concentrate a significant grouping of troops there and organize an offensive against Novorossiysk. Nevertheless, troops numbering 12-15 thousand people were constantly on it to hold the bridgehead. Malaya Zemlya also had no great tactical significance, since Novorossiysk was already under fire from Soviet artillery from the eastern coast of the Tsemess Bay and could not be used by the Germans as a port. But Malaya Zemlya was constantly subjected to shelling and raids by the Luftwaffe. The defenders of Malaya Zemlya suffered heavy losses, but heroically repelled all German attacks. The enemy owned the dominant heights, and the defenders of Malaya Zemlya had to dig deep into the ground. A particularly fierce assault was made on April 17-19, but it was repulsed with the help of

aircraft operating from the mainland. The Germans also suffered heavy losses. In total, 78.5 thousand Red Army soldiers passed through Malaya Zemlya.

The successful offensive of the Soviet troops in Ukraine in the spring of 1943 put the Taman Wehrmacht group in a difficult situation. September 3, 1943 Hitler gave the order to withdraw troops from the Kuban. The garrison of Malaya Zemlya was also unable to prevent the evacuation of the Germans from Novorossiysk. It did not help that at dawn on September 10, ships of the Black Sea Fleet broke into the Novorossiysk port and landed 3 landing detachments - one on the western coast of the Tsemess Bay and two - in the port, on mined berths. These groups were isolated and could not interact with the landing force on Malaya Zemlya. On September 16, the Germans left Novorossiysk. The evacuation of the Taman Peninsula continued until 9 October. Despite all the efforts of the Red Army to prevent this, 260 thousand soldiers, 70 thousand horses, all equipment, artillery and food supplies were transported through the Kerch Strait to the Crimea. All that was left was fodder for the horses.

The myth of Alexander Matrosov

The myth of the feat of Alexander Matrosov lies in the assertion that Matrosov closed the embrasure of the German bunker with his chest and thereby ensured the success of the attack of his unit. The date of the accomplishment of the feat is also mythological - February 23, 1943, on the day of the Red Army

Hero of the Soviet Union Alexander Matveyevich Matrosov was born on February 6, 1924 in Dnepropetrovsk. The date and place of birth are conditional, since Sasha lost his parents in early childhood and was brought up in the Ivanovo and Melekessky orphanages in the Ulyanovsk region. For some kind of criminal offense (according to the official version - for unauthorized leaving the place of work, for which they also gave a term then) he was convicted and ended up in the Ufa labor colony for minors, was among the activists there and after his release worked in the same colony as an assistant educator. In September 1942, Matrosov was enrolled in the Krasnokholmsk Infantry School, but already in January 1943 it was sent to the Kalinin Front. According to the official version, on February 23,

1943, on the day of the 25th anniversary of the Red Army, Alexander Matrosov, a private of the 2nd battalion of the 91st rifle Siberian volunteer brigade, in a battle near the village of Chernushki near Velikiye Luki in the Pskov region, closed the embrasure of the German bunker with his chest, thus ensuring the successful advancement of his unit. In the report of the agitator of the political department of the 91st brigade of Siberian volunteers, Senior Lieutenant Volkov, it was said: "In the battle for the village of Chernushki, the Komsomol member Matrosov, born in 1924, committed a heroic deed - he closed the embrasure of the bunker with his body, which ensured the advancement of our shooters forward. Blackies are taken. The attack continues. I will report the details when I return." However, in the evening of the same day, Volkov died, and the details of the incident remained unknown. In the report of the political department of the brigade to the political department of the 6th rifle corps, The Red Army soldier noted: of the 2nd battalion, the Komsomol member Matrosov, showed exceptional courage and heroism. The enemy from the bunker opened a strong

machine-gun fire and did not allow our infantry to advance. Tov. Sailors received an order to destroy the enemy's fortified point. Despising death, he closed the embrasure of the bunker with his body. The enemy machine gun fell silent. Our infantry went forward, and the bunker was occupied. Tov. Matrosov died a heroic death for the Soviet Motherland. On June 19, 1943, Alexander Matrosov was posthumously awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union. According to one version, the initiator of enrolling Matrosov forever in the lists of the unit and assigning the regiment his name was the commander of the Kalinin Front, Andrei Eremenko, who just in August 1943 met with Stalin during his trip to the front and convinced the Supreme Commander to make Matrosov's feat known throughout the country. By order of the People's Commissar of Defense of September 8, 1943, the 254th Guards Rifle Regiment, which included the 2nd Battalion of the 91st Separate Rifle Brigade, was given the name "254th Guards Rifle Regiment named after Alexander Matrosov", and the hero himself was forever enrolled in lists of the 1st company of this regiment. He became the first of the heroes forever listed in the lists of the military unit.

The report on the irretrievable losses of the 91st separate rifle brigade for the period from February 24 to March 30, 1943 states that the Red Army soldier Matrosov, born in 1924, a member of the Komsomol, was killed on February 27 and buried near the village of Chernushki. It was also mentioned here who and at what address should be reported about the death: Ufa, the children's labor colony of the NKVD, barrack 19, Matrosova, his wife. Judging by this entry, the hero had a family, but an orphan boy, who had no one in the world but his homeland, was better suited for the heroic myth. By the way, Volkov's political report was dated February 27, and February 23 was taken in the award sheet purely for propaganda reasons.

However, it is simply impossible to close the machine-gun embrasure with your body. Even one rifle bullet that hits the hand inevitably knocks a person down. And a machine-gun burst at point-blank range will surely throw any, the heaviest body, from the embrasure. The commander of the platoon in which Matrosov fought, Lieutenant L. Korolev, described in the front-line newspaper the feat of his subordinate: "... He ran to the bunker and fell into the embrasure. The machine gun choked on the hero's blood and fell silent.

I didn't have to give a command. The soldiers lying in front heard how Sasha, falling into the embrasure, shouted: "Forward!" And the whole platoon, as one man, got up and rushed to the bunker. Sergeant Kuznetsov was the first to run up to the entrance. Soldiers from his squad ran after him. The silent fight in the bunker lasted no more than a minute. When I entered there, there were six dead German soldiers and two machine guns lying among the shells and empty belts.

Atam, in front of the embrasure, on the snow covered with soot and blood, lay Sasha Matrosov. The last machine-gun burst cut short his young life. He was dead, but the battalion had already crossed the hollow and broke into the village of Chernushki. The order was carried out. Sasha Matrosov sacrificed himself to pave the way for the battalion to victory.

Korolev here turns the metaphor into reality, causing the machine gun to "choke on the hero's blood." True, it immediately turns out that there was not one machine gun in the bunker, but two. The lieutenant cannot explain how it happened that both barrels immediately choked with blood. However, the number of machine guns, as well as the data on the six corpses of the Germans, allegedly remaining in the bunker, must be approached with caution. No other source mentions them. If the press reported on the heroic death of one Soviet soldier or officer, then he must have accounted for several destroyed enemies. But on one point Korolev did not

deviate from the truth. According to him, the corpse of Matrosov was not lying on the embrasure, but in the snow in front of the pillbox. In this regard, however, it becomes completely incomprehensible how a dead submachine gunner could drown out an enemy machine gun.

Only in 1991, the front-line writer Vyacheslav Kondratiev, perhaps relying on eyewitness accounts, gave a different description of the feat: "Yes, Matrosov accomplished a feat, but not at all the one described. Back in the war, having learned about the feat of Matrosov, we were perplexed: why rush to the embrasure when you got so close to the firing point? After all, you can throw a grenade into the wide bell of a pillbox, you can open heavy automatic fire on it and thereby silence the enemy machine gun for a while. But Sasha, apparently, did not have a grenade, there was no machine gun either - the penal company in which he was, in all likelihood, was armed only with "darling" rifles. And Matrosov was forced

act differently: he, bypassing the pillbox (more precisely, the pillbox. - **B.S.**), climbed on it and tried to press the machine gun barrel from above, but the German soldiers, grabbing his hands, dragged him down and shot him. The company took advantage of this hitch. It was a reasonable,

skillful feat ... "This version is consistent with the testimony of some participants in the battle, who saw that Matrosov was on top of the bunker. It's just that the assumption that Matrosov was trying to bend the muzzle of a machine gun to the ground from above looks doubtful. This is almost impossible to do, since the muzzle almost does not protrude from the embrasure. It is more likely that Matrosov managed to get close to the vent of the bunker and tried to shoot the machine-gun crew, but he himself was hit by an enemy bullet. As he fell, he closed the vent. While the Germans were pushing the corpse from the roof of the bunker to the ground, they were forced to cease fire, which the Soviet company took advantage of, overcoming the shelled space. Obviously, there were only two Germans with one machine gun. While one of them was busy with the corpse, the other was forced to cease fire. The machine gunners had to flee, and the Red Army men who burst into the bunker found Matrosov's corpse with a wound in the chest in front of the embrasure. They decided that the fighter closed the embrasure with himself. Thus the legend was born. Meanwhile, the inscription on Matrosov's Komsomol ticket, made immediately after the battle by the assistant to the head of the political department, captain I. G. Nazdrachev, reads: "I lay down on the enemy's combat point and drowned it out, showing heroism." Here you can see confirmation of the version that Matrosov did not close the embrasure with his body, but lay down on the vent, which in the end

really "drowned out" the enemy machine gun. There is no evidence that Matrosov was in the penal company. On the contrary, Matrosov was a fighter of the elite 6th Rifle Siberian Volunteer Corps named after Stalin. It is possible that just the service of the hero in the formation, named after the leader, became an additional factor in the fact that the feat became known throughout the country.

The myth of the strategic bombing of Germany by Anglo-American aircraft

Main the myths of the Anglo-American strategic bombing of Germany in 1943-1945 are that they played a decisive role in the collapse of German resistance in World War II. This thesis was actively disseminated during the war years by American and British propaganda, and in the postwar years it became widespread in Anglo-American historiography. An opposite and equally mythological thesis was reinforced in Soviet historiography, which asserted that the Anglo-American bombing of Germany only slightly reduced its military and economic potential. In January 1943, at the Casablanca Conference, Roosevelt and Churchill decided to begin strategic bombing of

Germany with a joint Anglo-American force. The targets of the bombing were to be both objects of the military industry and the cities of Germany. The operation was codenamed Point Blank. Prior to this, British air raids on German cities were of more moral than strategic importance. Now the main hopes were placed on the American B-17 Flying Fortress four-engine strategic bombers. Initially, German aircraft factories, as well as factories for the production of engines and ball bearings, were identified as priority targets. However, on April 17, 1943, an attempt to attack the Focke-Wulf plant near Bremen with 115 bombers ended in failure. 16 aircraft were shot down and 48 damaged. Since the main aircraft factories were located in the south of Germany, bombers were forced to fly there without fighter escort. This made daytime raids too risky due to insufficient fighter cover, and targeted bombing was ruled out during night raids. Raid on Schweinfurt, where there was a factory that produced almost 100% German

ball bearings, and on the center of the aviation industry Regensburg in Bavaria on August 17, 1943, led to the loss of 60 B-17s out of 377 and 5 Spitfire and P-47 Thunderbolt fighters. The Luftwaffe lost 27 Me-109, Me-110 and FV-190 fighters. About 200 civilians were killed. The second attack on

Schweinfurt on October 14, 1943, led to even more deplorable results. Of the 291 B-17s, 77 were lost. Another 122 vehicles were damaged. Of the 2,900 crew members, 594 were missing, 5 were killed and 43 were wounded. After that, the bombing of targets deep in Germany was postponed until the availability of escort fighters, which could accompany the bombers all the way from the airfield to the target and back. January 11, 1944, during the

attack of Oschersleben, Halberstadt and Braunschweig, 60 Flying Fortresses were irretrievably lost.

The third raid on Schweinfurt on 24 February 1944 was successful. Thanks to the escort of the P-51 Mustang and P-47 Thunderbolt fighters with external tanks, only 11 of the 231 B-17s participating in the raid were lost. "Mustangs" were able to fly to Berlin and back. The raid on Schweinfurt was part of the air battle over Germany, which later became known as "Big Week" and lasted from 20 to 25 February. During it, the Anglo-American Air Force, which attacked aircraft industry facilities, lost 378 bombers and 28 fighters, while the Luftwaffe lost 355 fighters and about a hundred pilots. This damage forced the Germans to sharply increase the production of fighters. From now on, they could not even dominate the skies over Germany. This guaranteed the success of the allied invasion of France. From the end of April 1944, the theater of operations was moved to France and the bombing was aimed at disabling the transport infrastructure in order to make it difficult to transfer German reinforcements. As a result of the raids, the total productivity of synthetic fuel plants from April to July decreased from 180,000 tons to 9,000 tons per month. Despite the fact that 200 thousand workers were specially allocated for the restoration of these enterprises, productivity in August was only 40 thousand tons per month, and this level was not raised until the end of the war.

Also, as a result of raids, the production of synthetic rubber decreased by 6 times.

Strategic bombing resumed in full in September 1944 and was now concentrated on fuel plants and transport infrastructure. As a result, fuel production dropped German army ^{synthetic} sharply, and since September 1944 the and the Luftwaffe were on starvation rations. Now the German air defense had little to oppose to the Anglo-American bombing. From the end of 1944, due to the depletion of synthetic fuel, German aircraft very rarely took to the air. Arms production in Germany grew until September 1944, and then began to decline due to the impact of strategic bombing. And in 1944, the Luftwaffe consumed 92% of synthetic gasoline and only 8% of conventional, and in the land army, the share of synthetic fuel was 57%. By the time the Anglo-American troops surrounded and occupied the Ruhr in March 1944, its industry was practically paralyzed due to the destruction of the transport infrastructure. When it turned out that it was not possible to permanently disable aircraft factories and other key industrial facilities in Germany with the help of aerial bombardments, the Anglo-American command decided to switch to area bombing (the so-called "carpet bombing") of large cities in order to undermine the morale of the German population and army. A series of such bombardments hit Hamburg between

25 July and 3 August 1943. More than 50 thousand people died, about 200 thousand were injured. Such a large number of victims was due to the fact that a fiery tornado arose in the city. Berlin, Cologne, Dortmund, Düsseldorf, Nuremberg and other cities were also subjected to carpet bombing. "Carpet bombing" also continued until almost the end of the war. The largest was the bombing of Dresden on February 23–25, 1945. At least 25 thousand people died then. There are higher estimates - up to 135 thousand dead. Many of the approximately 200,000 refugees could have perished in the city, although there was no exact count.

The last raid of the Flying Fortresses was made on April 25, 1945. In the future, due to the lack of targets in connection with the occupation of all major German cities by the Allied troops, strategic bombing was stopped. In total, 593 thousand people became

victims of the bombing of Germany within the borders of 1937, including about 32 thousand prisoners of war. About 42 thousand people died in Austria and the Sudetenland. About half a million people were injured. In France, 59,000 killed and wounded became victims of the Anglo-American bombing raids. In England - 60.5 thousand people died as a result of German bombing and shelling with V-1 and V-2 rockets. In general, the strategic bombing of German

cities did not play a decisive role in the outcome of the war, but it must be admitted that their role was significant. They significantly slowed down the growth of the German military industry, forced the Germans to spend significant resources on the restoration of destroyed factories and cities. In the last six months of the war, thanks to the constant destruction of the main factories for the production of synthetic fuel, the Luftwaffe was practically chained to the ground, which, perhaps, brought victory over Germany closer by several months.

The myth of the second battle for Kharkov, February - March 1943

The main myth of the second battle for Kharkov, preserved in Soviet historiography, is the assertion that Manstein's counter-offensive in February-March 1943, as a result of which German troops recaptured Kharkov, was a failed "revenge for Stalingrad". Soviet marshals and historians have also argued that the Germans' success was due to their superiority in tanks. On February 2, 1943, the troops of the Voronezh Front, General Nikolai Vatutin, began

the Kharkov offensive operation. The right wing of the South-West Front of General Filipp Golikov launched an offensive on January 26 and already on January 30 brought into battle the mobile group of General Markian Popov as part of the 4th Guards, 3rd, 10th and 18th Tank Corps.

The most stubborn resistance was provided by the Leibstandarte and Reich divisions from the SS Panzer Corps that had just arrived from France. The troops of the 6th Army under the command of General Fyodor Kharitonov liberated Kupyansk, Lozovaya, Izyum and Balakleya. Bypassing Kharkov from the south, the 6th Guards Cavalry Corps of General Sergei Sokolov moved. Parts of the 1st Guards Army of General Vasily Kuznetsov took Pavlograd, which opened the way to Dnepropetrovsk and Zaporozhye. On February 6, Hitler arrived at the headquarters of Manstein, who commanded Army Group South. The field marshal convinced the Fuhrer that the farther the Russians advanced to the west and southwest, the better, since the more likely they would fall

under the flank counterattack of the German panzer divisions. On the night of February 14, units of the 1st Guards Army broke into the northwestern suburbs of Kharkov and cut the Kharkov-Poltava highway. The commander of the SS Panzer Corps defending Kharkov, Obergruppenführer Paul Hausser, saving his troops from complete encirclement, on the night of February 16, decided to leave the city. This was done in defiance of Hitler's orders to hold Kharkov at all costs.

South of Kharkov, the 6th Army of the Southwestern Front successfully advanced to the Dnieper. The headquarters was going to defeat the German grouping in the Donbass. Stalin ordered Vatutin to occupy Dnepropetrovsk, Zaporozhye and Sinelnikovo in order to prevent the enemy from retreating beyond the Dnieper. The command of the fronts and the Headquarters believed that the enemy was defeated and could not offer serious resistance. But the German troops firmly held the Krasnograd region and the Kramatorsk-Krasnoarmeysk line, from where Manstein was going to launch a counterattack. In order to concentrate forces for the counteroffensive, he left Rostov-on-Don and transferred five tank divisions of the 1st and 4th tank armies to Kharkov.

This regrouping was not discovered by Soviet intelligence. It was believed that the enemy was hastily retreating and would seriously defend himself only at the turn of the Dnieper. On February 19, the troops of the Southwestern Front took Sinelnikovo. But this was the last success on the way to the Dnieper.

On February 20, the German counteroffensive began. The SS Panzer Corps from Krasnograd hit the right flank of the 6th Army, the 48th Panzer Corps attacked its left flank in the Gulyaipol area, and the 57th Panzer Corps of the 4th Panzer Army fought with the 1st Guards Army. The divisions of the 1st Panzer Army hit Popov's group. Vatutin considered that the counteroffensive was just an attempt to cover the withdrawal of the main forces of Army Group South to the Dnieper, and ordered the offensive to Zaporozhye to continue. When the 48th Panzer Corps went on the offensive on February 22, there was a threat of encirclement. The 6th Army began a disorderly retreat. On February 23, the 1st SS Panzer Corps connected in Pavlograd with the advanced units of the 48th Panzer Corps, closing the encirclement around two Soviet tank corps advancing on Dnepropetrovsk and Zaporozhye. And in the Debaltseve area, Hollidt's army group surrounded the 7th Guards Cavalry Corps. Vatutin asked the Headquarters to allow him to immediately withdraw his units across the Seversky Donets River. But permission was given only on February 25 and only for the troops of the right flank. By that time, the 40th German tank corps had defeated the 18th tank corps from Popov's group, and the latter left Krasnoarmeysk and Kramatorsk without the sanction of the Stavka. During the retreat, the 4th Guards Tank Corps suffered especially heavy losses. Now the main blow of the Germans was directed to Kharkov.

On February 26, the SS division "Reich" took Lozovaya. On February 28, the SS tank corps surrounded the 6th Guards Cavalry, 12th and 15th tank corps, 111th, 184th, 219th rifle divisions from the 3rd tank army in the Kegichevka - Krasnograd - Berestovaya River area. With heavy losses, having lost almost all the tanks, they managed to break through in the Taranovka area. The remnants of the army turned out to be incapable of combat, they had to be taken to the rear. The SS divisions "Reich" and "Leibstandarte" on March 4 tried to break through to Kharkov from the southeast, but were stopped by the stubborn resistance of the 25th Guards Rifle Division at Taranovka. Then Manstein redirected the "Leibstandarte" and the newly arrived SS division "Dead Head" to the junction between the 3rd Panzer and 69th armies. On March 10, units of the Reich division broke into Kharkov. The division "Totenkopf" bypassed Kharkov from the north and captured Chuguev. The 62nd Guards, 19th and 303rd Rifle Divisions, the 17th NKVD Rifle Brigade, the 86th and 179th Separate Tank Brigades of the 69th Army, which made up the Kharkov garrison, were surrounded. Also in the Bogodukhov area, three rifle divisions of the 40th Army, transferred to reinforce the 69th Army, were surrounded. Only a few of those surrounded in Kharkov managed to escape to their own on March 15. On March 18, Belgorod was captured by the Leibstandarte division. The 69th Army retreated to the eastern bank of the Seversky Donets. In order to prevent the further advance of the Germans on the Voronezh and South-Western Fronts, the Headquarters reserves had to be hastily transferred: two tank corps, the 1st tank,

21st and 64th armies. The reasons for the defeat were that Soviet intelligence missed the concentration of German tank groups, and the command of the Voronezh and Southwestern fronts, which decided that the enemy was retreating randomly to the Dnieper, failed to realize the scale of the enemy threat in time. The transfer of the 21st and 1st Panzer, and then the 64th Army, to the Voronezh Front was clearly too late. They could no longer join the battle before the beginning of the spring thaw and somehow influence the situation in the Kharkov and Belgorod region. It would be necessary immediately after the liquidation of the Stalingrad group of Germans to transfer the 21st Army not to the Central, but to the Voronezh or Southwestern Front. It was also necessary to transfer the 64th Army there, which for some reason was left as a reserve.

it was necessary to form not in the rear of the North-Western Front for the failed offensive against Pskov, but in the rear of the Voronezh or South-Western Front. Then Manstein's counterattack would have received a powerful counterweight in the form of three armies and could not have taken Kharkov. After all, the German tank divisions before the counteroffensive were weakened in the previous defensive battles, suffered significant losses, especially in armored vehicles, and would hardly have been able to cope with a fresh Soviet tank army. And over the troops of Vatutin and Golikov, they did not have a general superiority in tanks. However, after the capitulation of Paulus, Stalin and the Headquarters were in euphoria and again

wanted to attack everywhere. The best course of action for the Soviet command would have been to surrender Kharkov without a fight, so as not to suffer unreasonably large losses in the struggle for a city that could not be held anyway. However, both the Headquarters and the front command were

dominated by considerations of prestige. The losses of the SS Panzer Corps between January 30 and March 20, 1943 amounted to 11,519 killed, wounded and missing. The total losses of the German troops operating in the Kharkov region and on the approaches to the Dnieper in the period from early February to March 18 can be estimated at 35 thousand killed, wounded and missing. According to German estimates, Soviet losses amounted to more than 9 thousand prisoners and 35 thousand killed only to the "boilers" in the Lozova area and near Kharkov. German troops in the period from February 21 to March 18 destroyed and captured 567 tanks and 1322 artillery pieces. According to official figures, which are underestimated in terms of irretrievable losses, the Southwestern and Voronezh fronts in February and early March lost about 87 thousand killed and missing and about 116 thousand wounded. Actually, "revenge for Stalingrad", that is, the encirclement of significant Soviet forces, Manstein planned not during the counterattack on Kharkov, but later, when, after the capture of Belgorod, he was going to strike under the base of the Kursk salient. However, due to the stubborn resistance of the Soviet troops, the spring thaw, and most importantly, due to the complete unpreparedness for the offensive of the Army Group Center, which was just carrying out the evacuation of the Rzhev-Vyazma